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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Monday 18 July 2016

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr Speaker: Order. I am sure that the whole House will join me in expressing sympathy and solidarity with the French people following Thursday's horrific events in Nice. A short silence was held at 11 o'clock across the parliamentary estate to remember those involved. I have written to my counterpart, Claude Bartolone, this morning expressing condolences. I should also like to inform the House that I have received a letter from the President of the Chamber of Deputies of Italy telling me that her Chamber has established a cross-party committee on intolerance, xenophobia, racism and hate crime and has decided to name it the Cox Committee after our colleague, Jo Cox. In the President's words:

"Through this act, we will contribute to keeping the memory of Jo Cox, and of what she stood for, alive".

Oral Answers to Questions

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Business Rates

1. **Lucy Allan** (Telford) (Con): What progress his Department has made on enabling local authorities to retain 100% of business rates. [905883]

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Sajid Javid): I should like to associate myself with your comments about the tragedy in Nice, Mr Speaker. I am sure that the thoughts and prayers of the whole House are with the victims and their families and friends. I also warmly welcome the establishment of the Cox Committee.

The full retention of business rates is a reform that councils have long campaigned for, and it will shape the role and purpose of local government for many decades to come. To deliver this commitment, we have already published an open consultation inviting councils, businesses and local people to have their say on how the system should operate.

Lucy Allan: I congratulate the Minister on his new appointment and I really look forward to working with him. Businesses want to move to Telford all the time, and for that reason the move to 100% business rate retention will mean welcome extra revenue for our council. Are there any plans to top-slice business rate income from councils with higher levels of business rate income to subsidise those with lower levels?

Sajid Javid: We want councils to take bold decisions and to use the benefits of this measure to boost local growth. Some redistribution will be necessary among authorities to ensure that no council loses out if it collects lower business rates, but I can reassure my hon. Friend—who already does a lot to boost business in her local area—that where that is done, it will keep the extra revenue.

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): For business rates to keep flowing, we need our top companies to keep prospering. The Secretary of State might be aware that ARM Technology, a major Cambridge company, has today been acquired by a major Japanese company. What conversations has he had with the former Business Secretary on ensuring that guarantees are maintained and that the jobs involved are retained in the UK?

Mr Speaker: Very tenuous—ingenious, but tenuous.

Sajid Javid: I warmly welcome investment in our local communities—including in Cambridgeshire—wherever it comes from. I have not had a conversation with the Business Secretary, given that this news was announced only recently, but I know that the Chancellor has already issued a statement.

Mr Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford) (Con): At present, the way in which business rates work imposes rates on empty properties. This is holding back many urban regeneration schemes. Will the new Secretary of State therefore reform the way in which those rules work before the whole scheme is transferred to local authorities? That would make a crucial difference to the modernisation of our housing estates in particular.

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend raises an important point, and I know that he speaks from experience as a former housing Minister. I will certainly take a fresh look at that.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): I welcome the Secretary of State to his new post. May I politely say to him that not every area has the same ability to raise income from business rates or council tax, and it is often the poorest areas that are disadvantaged as a result of lower income generation from both sources? Will he look at the example of Tameside Metropolitan Borough, which would need an additional 16 Ikea stores just to break even on its business rate retention? Will he ensure that, when he looks at redistribution, he ends up with a fair settlement for areas such as Tameside?

Sajid Javid: The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point. The needs of each area are different, which is why at the same time as launching the consultation we launched a fair funding review to look at the issues that the hon. Gentleman raises.

Grahame M. Morris (Easington) (Lab): May I also associate myself and Labour Front Benchers with your remarks about the atrocity in Nice, Mr Speaker?

I welcome the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government and his team to their new positions—it is an important brief.

I point out to the Secretary of State that his Government have broken the post-war cross-party consensus on the equalisation of resource allocation. To echo the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne), does the Secretary of State realise that the most deprived communities with the greatest needs often have the lowest tax bases and the least ability to raise their own business rates?

Sajid Javid: I warmly welcome the hon. Gentleman's words. As I have said, as we approach the policy of 100% business rates retention, there will of course be some redistribution to ensure that no council loses out if it has a low business rate funding base. The fair funding review will look at just that—fair funding—to ensure that every local area gets the funding it deserves.

Coastal Regeneration

2. **Peter Aldous** (Waveney) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to regenerate the Great British coast. [905884]

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Sajid Javid): The Government recognise that coastal communities face particular challenges but have huge economic potential. We have already invested £120 million in 211 coastal communities fund projects and have provided £10,000 to each of the 118 coastal community teams.

Peter Aldous: I welcome the Secretary of State to his place. While a great deal is taking place to regenerate coastal towns such as Lowestoft, there is a concern, as highlighted by the British Hospitality Association last week, that such initiatives are not co-ordinated. In the first full week of the new Government, I urge the Secretary of State to appoint a Minister to work across Departments to address that concern.

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend works hard on his constituents' behalf and has already helped to secure almost £2 million from the coastal communities fund for his area, but he makes an excellent point about cross-Government co-operation. I am pleased to announce that my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy) is the Minister who will take responsibility for this area, so we can all be assured that it is in very safe hands. I also want to thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois) for all his excellent work.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): My constituency has many coastal destinations that would be attractive to anyone—not just those in my area. The Secretary of State will be aware of the cross-party, cross-regional group within Westminster that has been meeting regularly over the past few months. What discussions has he had with the Northern Ireland Assembly and with other regions to ensure that we can do this together?

Sajid Javid: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, at this point I have not had any discussions with my colleagues in Northern Ireland, but I can reassure him that they will be a priority, because it is good to talk and to co-ordinate even where policies are devolved.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): Commuters returning home to the glories of Milton Keynes can do so in just over 30 minutes. Travelling the same distance to Bexhill takes almost 2 hours. Is the Secretary of State willing to work with me and my neighbour, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Amber Rudd), to try to bring High Speed 1 trains down from Ashford to Hastings and Bexhill?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend makes a good point. I am more than happy to listen to his case and to work with the Secretary of State for Transport, because the issue will involve both Departments.

Homelessness

3. **Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the potential merits of introducing legislative proposals to extend local authorities' duty of care in homelessness cases. [905885]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr Marcus Jones): We are committed to putting prevention at the heart of our approach to homelessness. We have committed £315 million to local authority homelessness prevention funding and will work with local authorities, charities and Departments to consider further reforms, including legislation.

Kerry McCarthy: I thank the Minister for that reply, but Bristol City Council's budget for preventing homelessness was cut by 20% between 2011 and 2015. What extra funding will the Government make available to local authorities such as Bristol, which has experienced a significant recent rise in homelessness, to cope with the scale of the problem—particularly if their duty of care is extended under the metro mayor model?

Mr Jones: Homelessness acceptances remain less than half what they were under the peak of the Labour Government in 2003-04. That said, one person without a home is one too many. Last year, we provided Bristol with £1 million of homelessness prevention funding, which will be maintained each year across this Parliament. I know that Bristol is starting to do some innovative things in homelessness prevention, and I would very much like to meet the Mayor of Bristol to discuss both the work that is being done on rough sleeping and the task and finish group, which I know has been set up.

Mr Richard Bacon (South Norfolk) (Con): Given the provisions of the Self-Build and Custom Housebuilding Act 2015, a piece of legislation for which I have a certain affection, will the Secretary of State look at the work of the Community Self Build Agency, which is allowing vulnerable groups, such as the unemployed, the disabled and others, including homeless veterans, to obtain a place of their own and to stop being homeless?

Mr Jones: I had great enjoyment on the Housing and Planning Bill Committee, where my hon. Friend made considerable representation on behalf of people involved in self-build. It is certainly an important area, and one in which the new Minister for Housing and Planning,

my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon Central (Gavin Barwell), is interested, and he would certainly be keen to meet my hon. Friend to discuss that further.

Mr Speaker: We are all very glad that the Minister enjoyed himself so much.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): Homelessness in Scotland has fallen since the abolition of priority need in homelessness legislation. Given the rise in homelessness in England, might the Minister consider that?

Mr Jones: We are certainly keen to listen to what is going on in other parts of the Union, but we do need to acknowledge that the housing market in Scotland is different from that in England, and particularly from that in London. I am always keen to hear what we are doing in other parts of the UK so that we can improve the way in which we deal with homelessness prevention.

Alison Thewliss: I thank the Minister for his answer. Part of the difference in Scotland is that we abolished the right to buy, thereby allowing housing stock to be maintained. Will he also look at Wales, which has seen a reduction in homelessness, too? Its interesting practice of early intervention is helping to prevent people from becoming homeless in the first place.

Mr Jones: We are certainly looking at what has happened in Wales and at the way in which the legislation has been changed. It is extremely important that we assess the effectiveness of those changes. Those changes have only just been introduced, and we are looking carefully at their impact, but we need to look at not just one or two quarters of figures but a longer term picture to ensure that the changes in Wales would correlate to and work with the English system. I hear what the hon. Lady says on the right to buy, but people should have the opportunity to own their own home, and this Government are absolutely committed to that.

Council Services

4. **Mims Davies** (Eastleigh) (Con): What assessment he has made of the effectiveness of councils in delivering front-line services while limiting council tax levels. [905886]

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Sajid Javid): We are putting more power in the hands of councils—through devolution deals and the retention of 100% of business rates—to ensure that councils can save money and maintain front-line services.

Mims Davies: I thank the Minister for his response. Proper local plans for good front-line planning departments are labour intensive and require meticulous work by local authority officers. Does the Minister agree that creating a poor plan, which then fails due to a lack of evidence, is an example of the shocking waste of hard-earned council taxpayers' money?

Sajid Javid: I find myself agreeing with my hon. Friend. Planning should be at the heart of what local councils do. Local councils should be setting a vision

for the area, and using that as a framework for development. It should be a top priority for all councils. Where it does not happen, we should expect them to resource it properly.

Mr Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) (Lab): How on earth can local authorities manage to run their affairs in the way they used to, when this Government have cut £157 million from Derbyshire County Council? The same has applied to Labour-controlled Bolsover in a proportionate way. This Minister has a cheek to be talking about local government being able to spend money properly when his Government have been taking its money away.

Sajid Javid: The hon. Gentleman should know that funding is broadly flat in cash terms. More importantly, it is perfectly possible to find savings—local councils spend £1 in every £4 of public money—and at the same time to maintain and enhance local services.

Justin Tomlinson (North Swindon) (Con): To deliver greater devolution responsibility for local authorities, what more can be done to attract the very best councillors, particularly those with busy and successful careers?

Sajid Javid: I know that many colleagues in the House have considerable experience in this area, and it is something that I shall be looking at, because I have found that in local authorities across the country that I have visited, there is a very mixed level of ability, let us say, and more needs to be done.

Grahame M. Morris (Easington) (Lab): I hope the Secretary of State is aware of a recent report by the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services, which found that 93% of councils implemented the social care precept, but that raised only £380 million. Some £1.1 billion is needed to maintain social care at its current level. Social care is facing a perfect storm—there is growing demand from an ageing population, costs are rising, and budgets are being squeezed by central Government cuts—so what action is the Minister going to take to address the chronic underfunding of our social care?

Sajid Javid: It is a huge priority for this Government to make sure that adult social care is funded adequately. I do not accept that it is underfunded. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the precept. By the end of this Parliament it will raise an additional £2 billion a year. On top of that, the Government asked local councils how much they thought they would need by the end of this Parliament for adult social care. The number that came back was £2.9 billion; they got £3.5 billion.

Social Housing

5. **Kirsten Oswald** (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): What assessment he has made of the potential effect of the UK leaving the EU on the level of funding available for social housing. [905887]

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Gavin Barwell): Housing is a devolved matter. In England we have committed £8 billion to deliver 400,000 much-needed affordable homes—the largest affordable housing programme for nearly 40 years. The result of the EU referendum does not change that commitment.

Kirsten Oswald: The UK has had £43 billion of European Investment Bank loans over the past eight years, whereas non-EU countries such as Norway or Switzerland have had only £1 billion. Can the Minister provide any detail on his contingency plan for the funding of social housing and infrastructure projects when that EU finding inevitably dries up?

Gavin Barwell: That obviously makes some contribution towards our delivery of affordable housing but, as I said, the Government have committed £8 billion. That will deliver starter homes, shared ownership homes and more affordable and intermediate rent housing. This is the largest programme that we have seen in more than 40 years and it will make a big contribution to tackling the housing issues that we see in our country.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): I welcome the Minister to his new post, and I welcome the Government focus on affordable homes to buy through the starter homes programme, but we also need affordable homes to rent. Does the Minister agree that as we have made the decision to leave the EU, now is the right time to consider more investment in social rented homes to meet local needs and local affordability?

Gavin Barwell: My hon. Friend is right to say that we need a mix of tenures—a mix of offers. That is what the programme provides. He tempts me into decisions that will ultimately be for the Government and for the Chancellor at the next Budget, but he makes a powerful case for further investment in affordable housing.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): I welcome the Minister to his new role and look forward to seeing him and the Secretary of State at the Select Committee before long. Are the Government still committed to building a million homes in this Parliament? Given that leaving the EU could have a depressing effect on the private house building industry, will he reconsider the Government's current policy of not providing one single penny towards the building of social housing in their budgets, and recognise that to deliver a million homes, we will have to build some social housing?

Gavin Barwell: The simple answer to the Select Committee Chairman's first question is yes, we are still committed to building a million new homes. Across this House, I hope, there is a consensus that we need to increase the level of house building. As I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake), we are looking at a mixed programme, including investment in affordable and intermediate rent, as well as shared ownership and helping people to own their own homes. I point the hon. Gentleman to the research that shows that 86% of our constituents want to own their own home. One of the critical things that we should all be trying to do is help people enjoy the opportunity that nearly all of us as Members of Parliament enjoy.

High Street Retailers

6. **Luke Hall** (Thornbury and Yate) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to support high street retailers. [905888]

8. **Andrew Bingham** (High Peak) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to support high street retailers. [905891]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr Marcus Jones): This Government are supporting our high streets to thrive. We have introduced the biggest-ever cut in business rates, worth £6.7 billion, launched the high street pledge and the digital high street pilots, and introduced a fairer parking regime and sensible planning changes, and we are celebrating our high streets through the hugely successful annual Great British High Street competition.

Luke Hall: Chipping Sodbury has entered the Great British High Street competition. It has been the home of markets since the middle ages. It hosts mock fairs, Victorian evenings and the annual Sheep Search classic car runs. It is home to the Fabulous Baker Brothers. It has seven pubs on the high street alone. Will the Minister therefore welcome Chipping Sodbury's application and perhaps visit one of the most beautiful high streets in the United Kingdom?

Mr Jones: I am absolutely delighted to hear that Chipping Sodbury has entered the competition; it sounds as though it will put in a very competitive bid. The competition has been a wonderful initiative, which has shone a light on high streets around the country, where local people are working hard to make sure their high street remains at the heart of their local community. Last year we received nearly 200,000 votes from members of the public for the finalist, showing how much high streets mean to local people. I wish Chipping Sodbury well and hope to visit it, but I would also encourage other towns in my hon. Friend's constituency to enter, such as Thornbury, where my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's dad used to run a ladies' fashion shop.

Mr Speaker: Well, it is always useful to have a bit of information.

Andrew Bingham: The high streets in my constituency—in places such as Buxton and Glossop—are very much the hub of the town, so anything my hon. Friend can do to ensure we do not sit on our laurels and think, "We've done it" would be welcome. Will he tell me that we will continue to look to help the high street? As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will confirm following his visit to Glossop last year, it has a vibrant, happening high street that is crucial to the community.

Mr Jones: The Government are absolutely taking action to protect our much-loved high streets. We have introduced the biggest-ever cut in business rates, which will mean that 600,000 of the smallest businesses will not have to pay business rates again. Just last week, I also announced the high street pledge, under which 40 of our country's largest multiple retailers have signed up to local managers taking part in local initiatives to support the high street. I know my hon. Friend's area and towns such as Glossop, and they are fantastic places for people to live, work, shop and socialise. I would encourage him to encourage his local areas to put some of those towns forward for the Great British High Street competition 2016.

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): West Ealing used to boast high street names, but now it is all bookies, charity shops, fried chicken chains and, most prominently, BrightHouse, which is preying on the vulnerable, with white goods at sky-high annual percentage rates and repossession for defaulters. If the Government really want to put the “local” back into local business, will the Minister tell us when he will end the rip-off of BrightHouse?

Mr Jones: I am not going to bash businesses that create jobs and growth for our economy, but what I would say to the hon. Lady is that the Great British High Street competition identified some excellent practice, where things were going well and people were working extremely hard, and we have a good practice guide. I suggest that she pop down to Pitshanger Lane in Ealing, which has a fantastic high street and which is the proud recipient of the Great British High Street competition award 2015.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): Does the Minister accept that our high streets are in decline? We are losing small retail shops at the rate of 16 a day. We are seeing a decline in retail goods being bought on our high streets. He announced a plethora of things this morning, which he has repeated now, and he has said that that will, hopefully, turn things around. How will we measure the success of what he has announced in turning this decline around?

Mr Jones: We have to realise that there is a significant structural shift taking place in retailing, with many people now choosing to buy their goods online and in out-of-town shopping centres, rather than on the high street. We need to make sure, though, that the high street is fit for the 21st century. The Future High Streets Forum, which I jointly chair, is looking at how we restructure our high streets to bring in new investment, and particularly at how we bring more starter homes into our town centres so that we can start to really rejuvenate and regenerate places that offer something that out-of-town shopping and shopping on the internet just cannot compete with.

Rough Sleeping/Homelessness

7. **Sir Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to support homeless people. [905890]

12. **Stephen Metcalfe** (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to help rough sleepers and homeless people. [905895]

15. **Will Quince** (Colchester) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to help rough sleepers and homeless people. [905898]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr Marcus Jones): One person without a home is one too many. That is why we have increased central funding for homelessness to £139 million over this Parliament and protected council homelessness prevention funding totalling £315 million by 2020.

Sir Edward Leigh: Supporting homeless people will require real resources given to real people, such as the £115 million promised to the homeless charity Caritas Anchor House. May I encourage the Minister—and, indeed, the Secretary of State—to avoid, as he comes into his new responsibilities, just changing the deckchairs in different parts of Whitehall? In this context, will he please ditch his policy, or that of his predecessor, to impose an elected mayor on Lincolnshire?

Mr Jones: I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has heard my hon. Friend’s question about the potential, or not, elected mayor in Lincolnshire. With regard to homelessness, it is always good to hear about how charities such as the one that he mentioned are using innovative ways to tackle old problems. Providing support to help people to recover from homelessness is extremely important. It is absolutely key that we help people in that position to start to rebuild their lives. That is why we are investing £20 million in tackling rough sleeping and £100 million in move-on accommodation from hostels and refuges.

Stephen Metcalfe: Is my hon. Friend generally supportive of the No Second Night Out service, and how does he intend to ensure that it is available in all local authority areas?

Mr Jones: We are absolutely supportive of the approach taken by No Second Night Out, which my Department rolled out nationally in the previous Parliament. I absolutely want to build on the success of this initiative. Our new £10 million rough sleeping fund will scale up ways in which we can prevent and reduce rough sleeping. It will also go further, building on the successful approaches of No Second Night Out—and indeed “no first night out”, because it is best if we can prevent people from being on the streets at all. Details of this programme and the bidding round will be announced shortly.

Will Quince: Beacon House is a wonderful charity supporting the homeless in Colchester. What further support can the Minister give to local charities like Beacon House up and down this country in their work to tackle homelessness?

Mr Jones: My hon. Friend makes a good point. Charities play an extremely valuable part in the fight against homelessness. I know that he has taken part in a sleep-out to raise money for Beacon House, which this Department has also supported financially. I chair a round table with chief executives of a number of these vital homelessness charities to discuss what more can be done. The information that we have gathered at these meetings feeds directly into the ministerial working group, which I also chair.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister is a fair-minded chap, and he will know that homelessness is a complex problem. First, as he will admit, there is a link between the lack of affordable housing—both rented and to buy—in our major cities. In addition, many of those we see on the streets of London and in Yorkshire are people on the mental health spectrum who need assistance and help, and cannot get it.

Mr Jones: The hon. Gentleman makes extremely fair points. That is why we are investing £1.6 billion over this Parliament to deliver an additional 100,000 homes for affordable rent. His point about mental health is extremely well made. I chair a ministerial working group and am working with other Departments, and Ministers in other Departments, to ensure that the links between things such as mental health issues and drink and drug dependency are dealt with across Government, because this is not just a housing issue.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): According to the Combined Homelessness And Information Network database, 8,096 people slept rough at some point in London during 2015-16—a 7% increase on the previous year. With an ever-growing housing crisis in this city, when are the Government going to take action and learn lessons from the different approaches taken by the devolved nations?

Mr Jones: As I said in my answer to the previous question, this is not just a housing issue and therefore we are working across Government to try to resolve it. We are putting a significant amount of money—£139 million—into this important issue during this spending review period. That includes £10 million to scale up initiatives to prevent and reduce rough sleeping, which is extremely important, and £10 million for an upgraded social impact bond, which had a significant amount of success during the last Parliament.

20. [905903] **Julian Knight** (Solihull) (Con): Following the examination by the Communities and Local Government Committee, of which I am a member, of homelessness policy, and the private Member's Bill promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman), will the Minister look into an approach whereby local authorities in England are specifically measured on their responsibility for homelessness?

Mr Jones: We are aware that the Select Committee is due to publish its report shortly. Although we have not yet had sight of the report, I am keen to see the Committee's recommendations and how it can help shape our programme of work. We want to ensure that local authorities have the tools that they need to put prevention absolutely at the heart of tackling homelessness. Good data and measurement are vital for that prevention, and that is why we are currently looking at how the data are collected and used to support prevention, so that we can find those at risk of becoming homeless far earlier than we do at present.

House Building

9. **Mr David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the effect of the outcome of the EU referendum on house building. [905892]

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Gavin Barwell): The need for new homes continues, as does our commitment to delivering 1 million of them by 2020. We are keeping markets under review, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I will meet the major house builders this week.

Mr Hanson: I congratulate the Minister on his appointment. Uncertainty breeds uncertainty, and the problems faced before and after the referendum have resulted in the market value of many building companies falling by as much as 40% because of uncertainty about the future. I welcome the meeting that he is going to have this week with building companies. Will he agree to report back early to this House on what steps we can take to secure confidence on new build in the housing market?

Gavin Barwell: I am certainly happy to undertake to do that. I have two points to make. First, the right hon. Gentleman will have seen the steps that the Bank of England has taken to reassure markets following the referendum. Secondly, I draw his attention to a statement by Peter Andrew, the deputy chairman of the Home Builders Federation, who said on 5 July:

“House builders remain confident in the underlying level of demand for housing and will continue to deliver the homes the country needs.”

Kit Malthouse (North West Hampshire) (Con): Given the demand-and-supply equation for housing in this country, the Minister is correct to assume that there will still be strong growth in housing. Does he agree that it is very important that neighbourhood plans play their part in future planning policy and that they should, therefore, be strengthened? Would he like to take this opportunity to confirm that he will continue to support the strengthening of those plans in the forthcoming Bill?

Gavin Barwell: I am very happy to reiterate my support for that. It is worth noting that early figures show that neighbourhood plans provide about 10% more homes than local plans, so there is real evidence that giving communities a real say in the future of how their areas develop leads to more homes being developed, and we will legislate during this Session.

14. [905897] **John Healey** (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab): On house building, new research from the House of Commons Library shows that, in the six years under last week's Prime Minister, fewer new homes were built in this country than under any Prime Minister since the 1920s, including 14% fewer than under Gordon Brown, despite the downturn; 21% fewer than under Tony Blair; and 35% fewer than under Margaret Thatcher. The new Housing Minister and Secretary of State are not responsible for their predecessors' mistakes, but they are responsible for what happens now, particularly in the light of the EU referendum. After six years of failure on housing under Conservative Ministers, what changes can we now expect to see?

Gavin Barwell: The right hon. Gentleman was one of my predecessors, and under him new house building was at the lowest level since the 1920s. Obviously, we had to recover from that position. Net new dwellings last year were at the same level as the average over the whole period of the Labour Government. I point the right hon. Gentleman to one statistic: in the year to March 2016, 265,000 homes were given planning permission, which is the highest figure on record.

Business Rates

10. **Jeff Smith** (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): What steps the Government plan to take to ensure that the devolution of business rates does not adversely affect deprived areas. [905893]

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Sajid Javid): By the end of this Parliament, local government will retain 100% of taxes raised locally. There will be redistribution between councils, so that areas do not lose out on funding where they collect less in taxes.

Jeff Smith: I agree with the Secretary of State that, as he said earlier, no council should lose out, so there will need to be some system of top-ups and tariffs. We also need to use the opportunity to incentivise areas to promote growth. How will the Government ensure that this does not become just an administrative exercise that leads to another complicated local government funding formula by another name?

Sajid Javid: The hon. Gentleman's constituency has already seen a 44% fall in the claimant count since 2010, and this is another way to try to boost local growth by having control over local taxes. He makes the important point that we should make sure that no council loses out, and that is why there will be this redistribution, but at the same time there will be more ways to promote local growth.

Combined Authorities

11. **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield) (Con): What steps he is taking to encourage devolution of powers to combined authorities; and if he will make a statement. [905894]

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Sajid Javid): Our Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016 is delivering on our manifesto commitment to devolve powers and budgets to boost local growth in England. Ten devolution deals have been agreed already in local areas, covering some £7 billion of funds and some 16 million people in England.

Michael Fabricant: A few days before the referendum, we heard that 5,000 jobs would be lost from HSBC. Surprisingly, only three days ago Mr Nigel Hinshelwood, who is the chief executive of HSBC, announced 1,200 new jobs and said that no jobs would be lost because of the supreme efficiency of the west midlands area. What further developments are happening with regard to the west midlands combined authority, which has the potential to promote even more employment during Brexit?

Sajid Javid: I understand the vital importance of the west midlands and the financial sector in boosting growth in that area as a fellow west midlands MP. My hon. Friend will know that very recently, in my former role, I went there to open the midlands financial centre of excellence, which will further help to develop jobs in that area. The west midlands combined authority that

he asks about is now formally constituted; that happened last month. It looks set to have its first set of elections in May next year.

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab): Over the next five years alone, the north-east was due to receive £726 million in EU funding, but the north-east devolution deal promises only £30 million a year for 30 years. Despite what the Secretary of State said just now, many devolution deals were already in a state of collapse before the EU referendum. With such high levels of uncertainty because of Brexit, is it not time he revisited all the devolution deals?

Sajid Javid: There is no need to reconsider any of the deals. These are good deals that have been reached by local leaders and central Government, and they will all, in turn, help to boost local growth. The hon. Lady mentions EU grants. As my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning has mentioned, it is important that we bring certainty, and that is what we will be working to do.

19. [905902] **Martin Vickers** (Cleethorpes) (Con): One of the devolution deals that my right hon. Friend referred to a moment ago is the greater Lincolnshire deal, which is under consultation. May I urge my right hon. Friend, despite the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh), to push ahead with that deal with, as the two councils in my constituency want, an elected mayor as part of it?

Sajid Javid: As my hon. Friend knows, it is not right for central Government to impose deals on any area. We certainly will not be doing that. These are deals because they require an agreement to be reached, but we will certainly be working with all areas that are interested, including Lincolnshire, to see what we can do.

Grahame M. Morris (Easington) (Lab): The Secretary of State will be aware of the statement by the Local Government Association following the decision to leave the European Union. EU laws and regulations impact on many council services including waste, employment, health and safety, consumer protection, trading and environmental standards. My question on devolution is this: what steps is the Secretary of State taking to ensure that local government is consulted and represented when negotiations over the UK's exit from the EU commence, and that powers from Brussels are devolved to a local level, not centralised in Whitehall?

Sajid Javid: It is very important that local government, whether through the LGA or otherwise, has a say in the process of leaving the EU. I think we all agree that it is important that that is done properly, and I will certainly be taking it up with my right hon. Friend the new Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union.

Deprived Communities: Infrastructure Investment

13. **Lilian Greenwood** (Nottingham South) (Lab): Whether his Department plans to maintain infrastructure investment in deprived communities at the level currently provided by the EU. [905896]

17. Tristram Hunt (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab): Whether his Department plans to maintain infrastructure investment in deprived communities at the level currently provided by the EU. [905900]

Mr Speaker: I call Minister Andrew Percy.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Andrew Percy): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I share the House's surprise.

This Government remain committed to investment in growth and infrastructure across all parts of the United Kingdom. As the former Prime Minister made clear, while the UK remains a member of the EU, current EU funding arrangements continue unchanged. It will be for the Government under the new Prime Minister to begin our negotiations to exit the European Union and set out the arrangements for those in receipt of EU funds.

Lilian Greenwood: It is marvellous to welcome the Minister to the Dispatch Box. Nottingham has been allocated £10 million for its sustainable urban development strategy to fund projects that are critical to economic growth within the city and to provide vital public funding to support local businesses to grow and prosper. A further £7.8 million has been allocated for Nottingham and Derby's metro area biodiversity action plan for restoring, opening up and connecting urban open spaces. What assurance will he give me and our city council that these commitments will be maintained?

Andrew Percy: As I said a moment ago, as long as we are a member of the European Union, the funding regime remains as it is. We are working across Government to get the certainty we want; all of us share that ambition for when we do begin the process of exiting. I would say to the hon. Lady that major investment by this Government is not just limited to the funding that comes through the European Union. We have seen a massive programme of £12 billion of local growth fund investment, with 48 enterprise zones that have created 23,000 jobs and leveraged in £2.4 billion of private sector investment. We are committed as a Government to continuing to invest in infrastructure, such as HS2, of which I know she is a big supporter.

Tristram Hunt: May I, too, welcome the Minister to his job? He was part of a campaign which not only promised £350 million a week for the NHS if we left the European Union, but said that any lost EU funding would be matched by the Government. May I join my colleague, my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood), in trying to get him to confirm at the Dispatch Box that the £157 million from the EU destined for Stoke-on-Trent and north Staffordshire is underwritten by this Government? Mr Speaker, we have had enough of the Brexit baloney. Tell the potteries they are going to get their money.

Andrew Percy: I am pleased that the hon. Gentleman took such an interest in my campaigning on the referendum in Brigg and Goole. We have made it absolutely clear that while EU funds have delivered some important support for growth and jobs, that has been only a small

part of the much larger investment by this Government. It will be for the Government—in time, when we exit the European Union—to set out the funding arrangements and the guarantees. We hope to be able to work to get the certainty we require across Government once that process begins.

Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): May I welcome the Minister and all his colleagues to their places on the Front Bench? Is not one of the most important ways of delivering infrastructure for all communities to ensure that there is speed and certainty of delivery? Will my hon. Friend and his colleagues consider two things we can do swiftly in that respect? One is a major reform of the compulsory purchase legislation, which has been recommended by the Law Commission and is long overdue; the other is to follow up the suggestion of many observers that we would do well to increase the up-front level of compensation for infrastructure projects.

Andrew Percy: I thank the former Minister for his question. I can confirm, on the point he makes about compulsory purchase, that the changes he wants were in the Queen's Speech and will be in the Bill. He is of course absolutely right that we want certainty and to deliver on our infrastructure pledges as quickly and as swiftly as possible. I am more than happy to work with him, as a former Minister, to try to achieve just that.

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): Cornwall has received more EU funding than any other part of the country, but there are very real concerns about the current programme and the speed of access to the funds available. May I welcome the Minister to his new role? Is he prepared to meet me urgently to listen to these concerns and make sure that we can get every penny possible out of the EU before we leave?

Andrew Percy: I know of the work my hon. Friend has been doing in St Austell and Newquay on this issue. He is a doughty fighter for his constituents. I am happy to meet him this week to discuss just that.

Grahame M. Morris (Easington) (Lab): Assurances on EU structural funds—£5.3 billion of funds for local government—is a key issue. With respect to the Minister, whom I welcome to his place, may I, as an MP representing a northern constituency, point out that only one of the top 15 infrastructure projects receiving the most public funding is in the north? What assurances can he give that leaving the EU will not widen the economic divide in our country, and what guarantees can he give that investment from the EU will be maintained up to and after Brexit for the UK?

Andrew Percy: I thank the shadow Minister for his kind words. If he had seen the new Prime Minister speak outside No. 10 when she took office, he would know that she is clear that delivering economic development across the United Kingdom outside London is a key priority. That is exactly what we have done through our devolution process, the local growth fund initiative, £12 billion of funding, and commitments such as High Speed 2 that go way beyond anything promised by the hon. Gentleman's Government on transport in the north of England.

Mr Speaker: We are running late, but we must hear the voice of Shipley.

Green-belt Land

16. **Philip Davies** (Shipley) (Con): What his Department's policy is on the building of houses on green-belt land. [905899]

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Gavin Barwell): The Government are committed to the strong protection and enhancement of green-belt land. Within the green belt, most new building is inappropriate and should be refused planning permission except in very special circumstances.

Philip Davies: I welcome the Minister to his post, although I am sure he is disappointed to no longer be my Whip.

My constituents in Burley-in-Wharfedale, and other villages such as Baildon and Eldwick, to name but a few, are facing planning proposals for green-belt land, with 500 houses proposed for Burley-in-Wharfedale alone. Surely the whole point of the green belt is that it should not be subject to housing, and particularly not until all brownfield sites in the district have been built on. My constituents do not trust Bradford council to look after their interests, so they look to the Government to protect them. What can my hon. Friend do to protect their interests and stop that building on the green belt?

Gavin Barwell: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind words and wish his new Whip the best of luck.

If he looks through the national planning policy framework, he will see a clear description of what development is appropriate on the green belt, and a strong presumption that inappropriate development is harmful and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.

Mr Speaker: The Whip will certainly need to be a natural optimist.

Topical Questions

T1. [905923] **Karl McCartney** (Lincoln) (Con): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Sajid Javid): I am delighted to have been appointed Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government. I cannot wait to get on with the job, and particularly to deliver the huge number of houses that are so vitally needed across the UK. It is a great Department that will affect many lives. I also thank the previous Secretary of State and his Ministers for doing such a fantastic job. They will be a hard act to follow.

Karl McCartney: I welcome my broad-shouldered colleagues to their front-row positions. Given the Labour city council's decision in Lincoln last Thursday deliberately to hide from my constituents and taxpayers, and the local media, the true cost of rebuilding the White bridge in Hartsholme park, what is my right hon. Friend's view of councils who misuse the rules on exempt information because they do not want to be held accountable for their incompetence?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend is right to be concerned about that issue. All councils have an obligation to disclose information unless there are compelling reasons not to do so. If he feels that the rules have been improperly applied, I recommend that he complains to the City of Lincoln Council, and if that does not work to the Information Commissioner's Office. If that does work, he should come to me.

Teresa Pearce (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab): I, too, welcome the new Ministers, and particularly the new Housing Minister. We were both elected in 2010, we are both London MPs, and we have probably both seen our postbag grow with the housing crisis in London.

Last week the National Audit Office reported on the Government's progress in selling public land for 160,000 new homes. Will the Minister confirm that although the aim was to achieve £5 billion of land and property sales this Parliament, one year in, the Government have delivered only £72 million-worth of sales?

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Gavin Barwell): I thank the hon. Lady for her kind words. I will write to her with the detailed figures, but I and the Secretary of State are committed to doing everything in our power to drive up the number of homes built in this country, and she is right to say that the release of public land is a key element of that programme.

Teresa Pearce: I thank the Minister for his response; perhaps he will want to write to me about the following question as well. The Department's forecast shows that to meet the commitment to sell land for more than 160,000 homes, the Government will need to dispose of five times as much land as they did last year. The National Audit Office says that there is no mechanism to monitor the number of houses built. Given those concerns, is the Minister confident that he will meet his target, or will he revise it?

Gavin Barwell: We are absolutely determined to work with other Government Departments to ensure we maximise the amount of surplus public land we dispose of. As has been very clear in these discussions, there is a consensus across the House that we need to do everything we can to increase the number of homes being built.

T4. [905926] **Mr Christopher Chope** (Christchurch) (Con): In congratulating my right hon. Friend on his new position, may I seek his confirmation that he will support district councils that wish to retain their independence and status in two-tier local authorities?

Sajid Javid: We have no plans to change the tiering of authorities. My hon. Friend has my commitment that I will take that very seriously.

T3. [905925] **Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): My local authority measures the delivery of new social housing by issue of completion certificates. The Secretary of State's Department does it by site starts. Given that it is impossible for a site start to equate to a physical replacement, does the Secretary of State agree that the like-for-like replacement statistics to date are one big con?

Gavin Barwell: No, I do not accept that. The core of the Government's policy is that, as we dispose of housing through the right-to-buy mechanism, replacement of housing is key. I am happy to meet the hon. Gentleman to address the particular concerns he raises, but that is the existing policy.

T8. [905930] **Ben Howlett** (Bath) (Con): Given the Secretary of State's family connections in the west of England, he will be aware that it negotiated a unique devolution deal with his predecessor. Will he confirm that that devolution deal, which will bring much-needed funding to the west of England, will still go ahead?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Andrew Percy): I know my hon. Friend had some involvement in the deal, helping to achieve a consensus with local leaders. The west of England devolution agreement will see a new directly elected mayor and combined authority receive new powers to better manage transport across the area, linking new homes and people to the jobs and opportunities that we as a Government support with £900 million of significant new investment. The Government continue to work with local leaders to put in place the governance to deliver on the deal. I and my officials will continue to work to ensure that the Government deliver.

T5. [905927] **Tristram Hunt** (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab): The Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, the hon. Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy), refused to confirm that the £157 million of EU structural funds for the potteries will be matched by the Government, so can I try his boss? Will the EU regeneration funds be matched by the Government, or have the Brexiters sold north Staffordshire down the river?

Sajid Javid: First, the hon. Gentleman should just accept that Brexit means Brexit. The focus of the whole House should be on how best to deliver that. On EU funds, that is a fair question and a number of hon. Members have asked about that today. We need to reduce uncertainty. Now that the new Government are in place, we will certainly be working on this as an absolute priority.

T9. [905931] **David T. C. Davies** (Monmouth) (Con): The Minister will be aware that some people who provide social care are booked to do just a few minutes at each job and spend much of the day travelling at their own expense. This does not breach minimum wage legislation, but does the Minister agree that it is none the less wrong and that we should try to address it?

Sajid Javid: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. The law is very clear: workers who are travelling as part of their work should be paid at least the minimum wage. If that is not happening, it should be reported. If my hon. Friend is aware of abuses, he should certainly do that immediately.

T10. [905932] **Ann Clwyd** (Cynon Valley) (Lab): By 2020, Wales is expected to have received £1.9 billion from the European Structural and Investment Fund. In the light of Brexit, will the Secretary of State ensure that Wales will receive this funding to 2020? Will he pledge that the Government will continue to match European funding after we leave the EU?

Sajid Javid: The right hon. Lady asks a very fair question. A number of firms and local regions have been asking just that. That is why, as I said earlier, this is an absolute priority now for the Government to make clear.

Mrs Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): I warmly congratulate the Secretary of State on his appointment. Will he guarantee to the House that during his tenure as Secretary of State there will be no dilution whatever to the vital protections of the green belt?

Sajid Javid: I thank my right hon. Friend for her warm words. The green belt is absolutely sacrosanct. We have made that clear: it was in the Conservative party manifesto and that will not change. The green belt remains special. Unless there are very exceptional circumstances, we should not be carrying out any development on it.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): The proposed expansion of London City airport, a wholly private £314 million investment, will increase airport capacity in London and create hundreds of new jobs. When will the Secretary of State announce his planning decision on the application?

Sajid Javid: I understand the right hon. Gentleman's concerns. I have just started looking at this case, and he will understand that I cannot say too much publicly at this point, but it is being taken very seriously.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I am sorry but we must move on. We have a very heavily subscribed set of exchanges today.

Terrorist Attack: Nice

3.30 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Amber Rudd): With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement about the terrorist attack in Nice and the threat we face from terrorism in the UK.

The full horror of last Thursday night's attack on the Promenade des Anglais in Nice defies all comprehension. At least 84 people were killed when a heavy goods lorry was driven deliberately into crowds enjoying Bastille day celebrations. Ten of the dead are believed to have been children and teenagers. More than 200 people were injured and a number are in a critical condition. Consular staff on the ground are in touch with local authorities and assisting British nationals caught up in the attack, and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is providing support to anyone concerned about friends or loved ones.

Over the weekend, the French police made a number of arrests, and in the coming weeks we will learn more about the circumstances behind the attack. These were innocent people enjoying national celebrations—they were families, mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, daughters, sons, friends, and many of them were children. They were attacked in the most brutal and cowardly way possible, as they simply went about their lives. Our thoughts and prayers must be with the families who have lost loved ones, the survivors fighting for their lives, the victims facing appalling injuries and all those mentally scarred by the events of that night.

I have spoken to my counterpart, Bernard Cazeneuve, to offer him the sympathy of the British people and to make it clear that we stand ready to help in any way we can. We have offered investigative assistance to the French authorities and security support to the French diplomatic and wider community in London. This is the third terrorist attack in France in the last 18 months with a high number of deaths, and we cannot underestimate its devastating impact. We have also seen attacks in many other countries, and those killed and maimed by these murderers include people of many nationalities and faiths. Recently, we have seen attacks in Bangladesh, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Turkey and America, as well as the ongoing conflict in Syria, and last month we marked a year since 38 people—30 of them British—were murdered at a beach resort in Tunisia.

In the UK, the threat from international terrorism, which is determined by the independent joint terrorism analysis centre, remains at "severe", meaning that an attack is "highly likely". The public should be vigilant but not alarmed. On Friday, following the attack in Nice, the police and security and intelligence agencies took steps to review our security measures and ensure we had robust procedures in place, and I receive regular updates. All police forces have reviewed upcoming events taking place in their regions to ensure that security measures are appropriate and proportionate.

The UK has considerable experience in managing and policing major events. Extra security measures are used at particularly high-profile events, including—when the police assess there to be a risk of vehicle attacks—the deployment of the national barrier asset. This is made up of a range of temporary equipment, including security fences and gates, that enables the physical protection of

sites. Since the terrorist attacks in Mumbai in 2008, we have also taken steps to improve the response of police firearms teams and other emergency services to a marauding gun attack. We have protected and increased counter-terrorism police funding for 2016-17 in real terms, and over the next five years, we are providing £143 million for the police to boost their firearms capability further.

We continue to test our response to terrorist attacks, including by learning the lessons from attacks such as those in France and through national exercises involving the Government, the military, the police, the ambulance and fire and rescue services and other agencies.

The threat from terrorism, however, is serious and growing. Our security and intelligence services are first rate, and they work tirelessly around the clock to keep the people of this country safe. Over the next five years, we will make an extra £2.5 billion available to those agencies, and that will include funding for an additional 1,900 staff at MI5, MI6 and GCHQ, as well as strengthening our network of counter-terrorism experts in the middle east, north Africa, south Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.

We have also taken steps to deal with foreign fighters and to prevent radicalisation by providing new powers through the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015, and we continue to take forward the Investigatory Powers Bill, which will ensure that the police, the security and the intelligence agencies have the powers they need to keep people safe in the digital age.

The UK has in place strong measures to respond to terrorist attacks, and since coming to office in 2010 the Government have taken significant steps to bolster that response, but Daesh and other terrorist organisations seek to poison people's minds and they peddle sickening hate and lies to encourage people to plot acts of terrorism or leave their families to join terrorists. That is not just in France or this country, but in countries all around the world. We must confront that hateful propaganda and expose it for what it is.

In this country, that means working to expose the emptiness of extremism and safeguard vulnerable people from becoming radicalised. Our Prevent programme works in partnership with families, communities and civil society groups to challenge the poisonous ideology that supports terrorism. This includes supporting civil society groups to build their own capacity, and since January 2014 its counter-narrative products have had widespread engagement with communities. In addition, more than 1,000 people have received support since 2012 through Channel, the voluntary and confidential support programme for those at risk of radicalisation.

This is an international problem that requires an international solution, so we are working closely with our European partners, allies in the counter-Daesh coalition and those most affected by the threat that Daesh poses to share information, build counter-terrorism capability and exchange best practice.

As the Prime Minister has said, we must work with France and our partners around the world to stand up for our values and for our freedom. Nice was attacked on Bastille day, itself a French symbol of liberation and national unity. Those who attack seek to divide us and spread hatred, so our resounding response must be one of ever-greater unity between different nations but also between ourselves. This weekend we saw unity in action

[Amber Rudd]

as people came together to support each other. People sent messages of condolence, and Muslims in this country and around the world have said that those who carry out such attacks do not represent the true Islam.

I want to end by sending a message to our French friends and neighbours. What happened in Nice last Thursday was cruel and incomprehensible. The horror and devastation is something many people will live with for the rest of their lives. We know you are hurting; we know this will cause lasting pain. Let me be quite clear: we will stand with you; we will support you in this fight, and together with our partners around the world, we will defeat those who seek to attack our way of life.

3.38 pm

Andy Burnham (Leigh) (Lab): I start by welcoming the Home Secretary to her new position and welcoming her well-judged and heartfelt words to the House today. She spoke for us all in condemning this nauseating attack, and in sending our sympathy and solidarity to the families affected and to the French people. From the very outset of the right hon. Lady's tenure, let me assure her of my ongoing support in presenting a united front from this House to those who plan and perpetrate these brutal acts.

It is a sad reflection of the dark times in which we live that this is the third time in the last nine months that we have gathered to discuss a major terrorist incident in mainland Europe. Each new incident brings new factors and changes perceptions of the nature of the threat posed by modern terrorism—and this one was no different. This was an act of indiscriminate and sickening brutality, made all the more abhorrent by the targeting of families and children. Ten children and babies were killed, 50 are still being treated, and many more have been orphaned and left with lasting psychological scars. Unlike other attacks, this was not planned by a cell with sophisticated tactics and weapons. A similar attack could be launched anywhere at any time, and that is what makes it so frightening and so difficult to predict and prevent.

Let me start with the question of whether there are any immediate implications for the United Kingdom. On Friday, a spokeswoman for the Prime Minister said that UK police were “reviewing” security plans for “large public events” taking place this week. What conclusions were reached as part of that review, and were any changes made in the light of it? Will the Home Secretary be issuing any updated security advice to the organisers of the numerous large public gatherings and festivals that will take place throughout the country over the rest of the summer? We welcome the Mayor of London's confirmation that the Metropolitan police were reviewing safety measures in the capital. Can the Home Secretary confirm that similar reviews are taking place in large cities throughout the United Kingdom?

After the attacks in Paris, the Home Secretary's predecessor committed herself to an urgent review of our response to firearms attacks. It has been suggested in the French media that if armed officers had been on the scene more quickly in Nice, they could have prevented the lorry from travelling as far as it did. Has the review that was commissioned been completed, and if so, what changes in firearms capability are proposed as a result? In the wake of Paris, the Home Secretary's predecessor also promised to protect police budgets, but that has

not been honoured, and there are real-terms cuts this year. Will the new Home Secretary pledge today to protect police budgets in real terms?

The Home Secretary mentioned the Prevent programme. I have to say that I do not share her complacent view of what it is achieving. In fact, some would say that it is counter-productive, creating a climate of suspicion and mistrust and, far from tackling extremism, creating the very conditions for it to flourish. The Government's own Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation has said that the whole programme

“could benefit from independent review.”

Will the Home Secretary accept Labour's call for a cross-party review of how the statutory Prevent duty is working?

Immediately after the attack, it was described in the media as an act of Islamic terrorism, but it is now clear that the lifestyle of the individual had absolutely nothing to do with the Islamic faith, and the French authorities have cast doubt on whether there was any link between him and Daesh. Does the Home Secretary agree that promptly labelling this attack Islamic terrorism hands a propaganda coup to the terrorists, whose whole purpose is to deepen the rift between the Muslim community and the rest of society? Does she agree that more care should be taken with how such atrocities are labelled in future?

This was, of course, the first attack in Europe since the European Union referendum. Can the Home Secretary assure the House that, in these times, she and the wider Government are making every effort to maintain strong collaboration with the French and the European authorities, and to send them the clear message that, whatever our differences, Britain will always be by their side and ready to help?

Amber Rudd: I thank the right hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) for his comments, and for his confirmation at an early stage that we work across the House to address and to fight this dangerous terrorism, and will be able to continue to do so.

The right hon. Gentleman asked particularly about the reviewing of public events. Let me reassure him, and the whole House, that we are constantly ensuring that we make expert advice available to the people who run such events. We have 170 counter-terrorism security advisers who are in touch with all of them—including, when necessary, those in large cities—so that they can be given the right advice. That advice is being taken, so that we can ensure that people are as safe as possible.

The right hon. Gentleman made some comments about Prevent. Let me correct him on one point. There is nothing complacent about what the Government do to address terrorism and dangerous ideology. I accept that there is always more to do, but the right hon. Gentleman should not underestimate what the Prevent strategy has achieved so far. Many people have been deterred from going to Syria. Many children have been introduced to the strategy at school, and people in the public sector have benefited from it and been prevented from going to Syria. There is always more to do, but a lot is being accomplished by this strategy.

Finally, the right hon. Gentleman made some comments about the reporting in the press about the role and the word of Islam, and I simply say to him that I think it is

for all faiths and all people to unite against the barbarity of this attack, and that is the clear message that this House should convey.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): As chair of our groupe d'amitié between the two Parliaments, may I just encourage my good friend the Secretary of State—we have served on the Council of Europe together on many of these issues—*donne-à nos amis Français notre solidarité, nos pensées et notre encouragement?* Nous sommes avec vous maintenant et pour toujours.

Amber Rudd: My hon. Friend is entirely right: nous sommes avec vous—and now I will return to English. I was able to speak to my French counterpart this morning, Bernard Cazeneuve, and I also say, in part response to my hon. Friend, that of course we will continue our very strong friendship and mutual support for the French whatever the outcome.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): I congratulate the Home Secretary on her new role, and welcome her to her place. I trust she will bring to her role the rigour and wit she displayed on behalf of the Remain campaign during the EU referendum. I also hope the fact that we are both graduates of Edinburgh University of about the same vintage will enable us to work together in the same constructive fashion as I hope I did with her predecessor.

There are no words to describe adequately the unspeakable horror, the merciless cruelty and the senselessness of the attack perpetrated in Nice last week. One's heart goes out to the victims, the bereaved and the injured, especially the children. I wish to add the condolences of myself and my colleagues on the Scottish National party Benches to the people of France. I welcome the tone of the Home Secretary's statement and thank her for notice of it, and I would like to associate myself and the SNP with her comments about the gratitude we all feel to those who strive to keep us safe, whether it be the police or the intelligence services.

Scotland, like the rest of the UK, stands in sadness and solidarity with France, a country that has already had to bear way more than any country should be expected to. We stand ready to offer whatever assistance we can. While there are no doubt challenges that we face from this increasingly savage criminality and terrorism, the Scottish Government are committed to working with the UK Government to defeat these threats against the freedoms we all value so dearly.

I am pleased by the reassurances the Home Secretary has already given and I have just three questions for her. First, will she give a commitment that her response to terrorist attacks will never be knee-jerk, but will always be proportionate and targeted, as well as effective? Secondly, will she give similar assurances to those given by her predecessor to affirm the importance of having a united community across the UK at the core of our efforts in fighting terrorism, and in particular will she acknowledge the importance of avoiding alienating our Muslim community, who are a highly valued and integral part of Scottish and United Kingdom society? Thirdly, there are camps in northern France filled with refugees who have experienced similar violence to that perpetrated in Nice. Just last week the camp in Calais, where people have perforce had to make their homes, was threatened

with bulldozing and demolition. Will the Home Secretary work with the French Government to ensure the understandable anger of the French populace is not misdirected towards those innocents, who are also fleeing from violence in their own countries?

Amber Rudd: I thank the hon. and learned Lady for her comments and her introductory remarks, and also for repeating the same message we have received from the Opposition: that we will all work together on addressing this dangerous issue. She asked a number of key questions, and I of course reassure her that I hope there will never be anything knee-jerk in our response to such events. I hope we will be able to build on the experiences we have in order to get a more secure future.

The hon. and learned Lady has asked us to work across communities, and I imagine she meant devolved communities as well as all faith communities, and of course we will do that. I am reminded, because we have already had questions about large events, that a good example of us working with devolved Administrations was when we worked together on the Glasgow Commonwealth games in 2014 jointly to combat any terrorism there.

Finally on Calais, the hon. and learned Lady is absolutely right that we need to work closely with our French counterparts and I did discuss that this morning with Bernard Cazeneuve, and I will take that forward with him to make sure we get the best outcome.

Michael Gove (Surrey Heath) (Con): May I welcome my right hon. Friend to her new position and thank her for her measured, assured and authoritative statement? Does she agree that both the previous Prime Minister and our new Prime Minister have always made it clear that there is a distinction between the ideology of Islamist extremism, which animates organisations such as Daesh and is driven by prejudice and hate, and the great religion of Islam, a religion of peace that brings spiritual nourishment to millions? Is it not vital in the days ahead that while we focus on countering extremism, we also underline the benefits that the faith of Islam has brought to so many?

Amber Rudd: I thank my right hon. Friend for making that important point so eloquently, as is often the case. He is absolutely right to say that we need to make that distinction, and I say once more that it is for all faiths and all people to unite together to make sure we condemn this dreadful terrorism.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): I warmly welcome the Home Secretary to her new position and remind her that her predecessor had a career-enhancing 20 appearances before the Select Committee during her time in office—I hope she will continue with that engagement in her new office. Reports have emerged from France, from Bernard Cazeneuve and Manuel Valls, that the perpetrator of this atrocity had been radicalised very quickly by the internet. Does the Home Secretary agree that whatever the truth of this as it emerges, the internet remains a key battleground in our fight against terrorism? Will she do all she can to work with Europol and Interpol to make the internet companies do more to take down those subversive videos?

Amber Rudd: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his question, and of course I look forward to every one of my appearances before his Select Committee. He raises an important point about how people are radicalised. First, I must suggest a moment of caution, because we do not know the answer on that yet; we perhaps know some of the examples of where this person was not radicalised, but we do not know exactly how he was radicalised, and that investigation is going on. I agree with the right hon. Gentleman that making sure that the internet is not used as a dangerous tool for radicalising people is incredibly important. We do have a strategic communications unit, based in the Foreign Office, which takes down websites, but we will always make sure we do as much as possible to address that particular source.

Mr Keith Simpson (Broadland) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on her elevation to the Home Office. May I ask her, given that she emphasised the global threat of terrorism, whether any lessons have been learned from this latest terrorist attack for the security arrangements for the Olympic games? We will not have an opportunity to discuss that, so is she satisfied that the efforts that our security services are putting in will mean that our participants will be safe?

Amber Rudd: I thank my right hon. Friend for the question, and I can reassure him that we are already engaged with the people who are running the Olympics in Brazil to make sure that we make the games as safe as possible. Our London Olympics team went over to ensure that that was the case. We think we have substantial expertise here, and we are happy to share it, particularly where there are large events such as the Olympics.

Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): I welcome the Home Secretary to her new post. Terrorism is aptly named, as it thinks up new and more awful ways of committing mass murder. What discussions has she had with the intelligence and security services about unconventional weapons being used in terrorism? Given that Nice is a provincial city in France, can she tell me honestly that my constituents in Wolverhampton enjoy the same level of protection against terrorism as people living in London?

Amber Rudd: I am here to reassure the right hon. Gentleman and his constituents that we are doing all we can to ensure that they and all of our constituents are kept safe, and we will always keep particular incidents under review to make sure that we can give people as much certainty as possible. One thing we are particularly focused on is large crowds and big events, and the Security Service and the police will be monitoring and reviewing particular events, or places of large gatherings, to ensure that we keep people safe.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): Our security forces have to overcome huge inhibitions before deciding to open fire on someone who poses a lethal threat to innocent people. Can the Home Secretary confirm that if such a decision is made, the intention must be to stop the threat in its tracks, which invariably means shooting to kill, not to wound?

Amber Rudd: My hon. Friend puts it very well. Clearly, the priority must be to save innocent lives. We must always ensure that our security forces and police firearms

officers have not only the right tools and equipment but the right permissions to do what is necessary to keep us all safe.

Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): I too welcome the Home Secretary to her new role albeit in such tragic circumstances.

Media reports today state that, unlike with previous terrorist attacks in France, no clear link has yet been established between the person who committed these terrible offences and recognised terrorist groups. Can she confirm that that is the case and, if so, tell us what steps the UK Government are taking to address this rather worrying development?

Amber Rudd: I thank the hon. Lady for her question. I must point out that we are talking about a French citizen in Nice, and that we are awaiting further information. I think she is drawing attention to potential radicalisation from the internet, which some people are suggesting is what happened in this case. We will of course keep the matter under review and see what other action we can take, but we must wait to see what the conclusions are.

Mr Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley) (Con): Hundreds of thousands of British families will already have booked holidays this summer, and many of them will be going to the French Riviera, to Paris or to some of the other wonderful cities around France. Will the Home Secretary work with the Foreign Secretary to ensure that British families are given common-sense guidance to keep them safe during the holidays? I hope that none of them will change their plans, so that part of our standing side by side with the French people will involve many British families enjoying holidays in France this year.

Amber Rudd: My hon. Friend makes an important point. He has put his finger on exactly what a lot of people will be thinking at the moment. I would advise him, his constituents and friends who are concerned to check the Foreign Office website. We will ensure that there is always as much helpful and current information on it as possible.

Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): Will the Home Secretary tell us what progress is being made to ensure that the Investigatory Powers Bill reaches the statute book? She will know that the powers in the Bill are essential for supporting the security services in dealing with potential lone attackers, profiling such attackers and ensuring that we use the internet to protect our safety as well as the liberty of individuals.

Amber Rudd: The right hon. Gentleman makes an important point. He is right that the Investigatory Powers Bill will give us additional help to intercept the sort of terrorism that created the events of last weekend. I hope that we will be able to get it on the statute book by the end of the year. This is exactly the sort of event that makes it even more pressing for us to do so.

Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con): The Secretary of State might be aware that, in the Home Affairs Committee's inquiry into radicalisation and home-grown terrorism, we took evidence on the alarming trend of online radicalisation, especially of loners and low-level criminals. She has mentioned the internet, and social media sites

were found not to be robust enough in either removing or blocking content posted by Daesh and its affiliates, which is uploaded only to terrorise or to groom would-be terrorists. Will she undertake a review of social media sites and their ability to be used to groom vulnerable people?

Amber Rudd: My hon. Friend raises an important point. It is critical that we address the radicalisation that can happen through social media and internet sites. That is why we have a strategic communication unit based in the Foreign Office, and we are focused on taking down websites of that kind. We will continue to keep the matter under review to ensure that we do as much as possible.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): On the behalf of the Liberal Democrats, I welcome the new Home Secretary to her role and echo her condolences to the families and friends of those who were so senselessly murdered. The massacre of the innocents in Nice will strengthen the resolve of all who believe in democracy and freedom to confront terrorists wherever in the world they strike. When our closest ally is under attack, does the Home Secretary agree that the UK must use all the organisations and measures at our disposal to help, including Interpol, Europol and the European arrest warrant, and that the closest possible co-operation is our best defence against the murderous activities of terrorists or lone wolves?

Amber Rudd: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his comments and for the Liberal Democrats' support for the consensus in the House to stand with our allies—our friends—in France. He is right that we need a close relationship with our allies, both European and those from outside Europe, to ensure that we deepen knowledge and share information to combat terrorism. I will ensure that we continue to do that.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): Tourist destinations and travel interchanges have tragically been the targets of evil terrorist acts. Will the Home Secretary provide a firm assurance that Gatwick airport will receive the necessary security resources to ensure that those travelling through will be safe this summer and beyond?

Amber Rudd: I am pleased that my hon. Friend raises that point, because I am keen to reassure everybody that that is exactly what will happen. We will continue to keep our airports under constant review—we must. We will do so by ensuring that everyone who works at Gatwick, lives around it and travels through is as safe as possible.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Home Secretary for her statement and wish her well in her new role. Our hearts ache for all those who have lost loved ones in France and elsewhere.

According to interviews in the media, it seems that security levels in Nice and across France were reduced after the Euros. The United Kingdom has been at a high level of readiness for some years—since 2010 in Northern Ireland. Does the Home Secretary accept that the threat level will be severe for the foreseeable future, that the general public must be vigilant, careful and

responsive and that, now more than ever, the exchange of intelligence between the security forces of western countries must continue?

Amber Rudd: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments. He is absolutely right that the terror threat level is already at severe, and that we must all be vigilant. We will continue to take that approach until we have any other information to the contrary, but our current status, given that so many people want to do us harm, is that we must be vigilant.

Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con): Once upon a time, it was useful to refer to lone wolves—individuals who would attack without any institutional support. Does my right hon. Friend agree that such people do not exist today? Due to the internet and online radicalisation, behind every lone wolf is a pack of wolves supporting them online. Will she make it a priority as Home Secretary to tackle online radicalisation so that we can be better protected in the future?

Amber Rudd: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. A theme is emerging of many Members asking questions about the radicalisation of people through the internet. I will indeed ensure that we put extra effort into tackling that and keeping it under review, and that we take down the relevant websites as often as possible.

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): I welcome the Home Secretary to her new post. The shadow Home Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham), rightly said that a similar terrible attack could happen anywhere at any time. Salford's policing resources are already stretched by high levels of crime, including stabbings and shootings, in addition to the new threats. Can the Home Secretary assure me that she will protect Great Manchester police's budget so that the police can protect my constituents?

Amber Rudd: The police play a critical role in ensuring that we are all kept safe, which is why my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister protected the police budget in last year's review. However, I will certainly take a careful look at all spending within the police budget to ensure that the maximum amount is available for the clear, visible policing on our streets that plays such an important part in deterring criminal activity.

James Berry (Kingston and Surbiton) (Con): In light of the budget announcement that the Home Secretary has just referred to, will she confirm that the Metropolitan police has increased its armed response vehicle capacity, that this country's armed officers have the capacity to neutralise a threat like that in Nice and that we have the most professional armed officers in the world?

Amber Rudd: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We are very proud of the high standards of our professional armed officers, and we announced in April that the number of armed police would increase by more than 1,000 over the next two years. Additional round-the-clock specialist teams are being set up outside London, and 40 additional police armed response vehicles are on our streets.

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): I was on the Promenade des Anglais on Thursday evening, watching the fireworks with the crowd, and was very lucky to leave just a few minutes before the attack. The haunting sight for me, having been so fortunate not to have seen the carnage itself, came on my drive to the airport. The Promenade des Anglais is a busy thoroughfare, and the flowers for the victims stretched on and on and on—truly, it will haunt me for a long time.

Is the Home Secretary as troubled as I am by the tension between our natural human desire to focus in on the horror of events such as these—that is the focus of the world’s media and the focus of Parliament in statements such as this—and the inevitable extra publicity that that gives to the terrorists, who want to show that they can create a level of carnage and disruption far beyond what their military capability would otherwise allow?

Amber Rudd: I thank the hon. Gentleman for sharing his experience with us. Such personal stories make the tragedy come to life for us. He raises the important point that we want people to be vigilant and aware, but we do not want to give the terrorists the sort of publicity that they want. Our intelligence is that, because we are making progress against them and against Daesh in general, they are now trying to find ways of lashing out and being dangerous. It is right that we know that this is taking place, so that everybody can be vigilant against it.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): May I welcome my right hon. Friend to her new position? As it is some time since the announcement was made of the recruitment of 1,900 more security staff, can the Home Secretary tell the House how many have so far been recruited?

Amber Rudd: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. I cannot give him the exact number at the moment, but I can tell him that we have made good progress, and that I will write to him with that number.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): May I wish the right hon. Lady well in her appointment? With many British citizens due to take part in Battle of the Somme events this year, will she do all she can to ensure that visits go ahead and that we have good co-operation with our French allies so that British people taking part can be safe and secure?

Amber Rudd: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that it is essential that such events go on, particularly when we are remembering something like the Battle of the Somme—the scale of the massacre there puts some of the difficulties that we have here in perspective. I will indeed engage with my French counterpart to ensure that we do all that we can to give France the support that it needs to keep everybody safe.

Charlie Elphicke (Dover) (Con): May I congratulate the Home Secretary on her statement and welcome her and her team to their roles? Does she agree that whether we are in or out of Europe, Britain and France must stand together to tackle terrorism, tackle human trafficking,

keep our borders safe and secure and uphold the Le Touquet treaty? In that way, our two nations are safer, stronger and more secure.

Amber Rudd: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. National security remains the sole responsibility of member states, and we will continue to work bilaterally with France, sharing information and deepening our relationship so that we can ensure that we keep both our countries safe.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): I welcome the Home Secretary to her post. She is right to condemn these vicious atrocities in Nice. After the Paris attacks in November, her predecessor, the new Prime Minister, committed to a review of firearms responses in the United Kingdom. Can she update the House on how that review has gone and whether any changes have been instigated as a result of it?

Amber Rudd: I thank the hon. Gentleman. That review is ongoing—it is not finished yet, but I will make sure that I get him an update of where we are so that he is fully informed.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend to her place and condemn this barbarous attack, as everyone else has done.

I welcome the extra money that my right hon. Friend has mentioned. Is she happy that the training facilities for the armed police will be sufficient to meet the extreme use to which they may be put, such as storming buildings to rescue hostages? That will require a high level of skill, investment and training.

Amber Rudd: We have some of the best armed officers in the world to undertake such a response, and we are in no doubt that we will take all necessary action to keep our people safe. If that requires additional training or expertise, we will take that seriously and keep it constantly under review to make sure that we can deliver it.

Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab): I welcome the Home Secretary to her post. This horrific attack was carried out using no specialised equipment, but it is not enough for us to play catch-up and think about how to protect people from a lorry attack. We should be imagining the unthinkable and pre-empting and taking precautions against every method of attack. Without going into detail, of course, can the Home Secretary give us assurances that the security services are doing that?

Amber Rudd: The hon. Lady makes an important point about the type of weapon that was used in this case. I repeat that there is an ongoing investigation in France. We have no further information or details, but we are keeping large events under particular review, so that we can ensure that the people promoting or hosting such events always have the important information that they need to keep the attendees safe.

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): The murderous rampage of this evil terrorist was eventually halted by armed police in Nice. Will the Home Secretary reiterate how satisfied she is with the availability of armed rapid response units in our regional towns and cities?

Amber Rudd: We will continue to keep that under review to ensure that we always keep people safe. Over the next five years, for example, we are providing £143 million for the police to further boost their firearms capability. No risk will be taken with security.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): As well as deploying its security services and its police force, France has deployed more than 10,000 of its army personnel and has talked about calling up 55,000 reservists. During the Olympics, the British military played an important part in our security. May I assume that the Home Secretary is talking to the Secretary of State for Defence about the lessons that the British military can teach about ensuring security at large events?

Amber Rudd: The hon. Lady raises an important point about the value of collaboration between the Ministry of Defence and the Home Department to ensure that we always get the best outcome. We have done that work previously, and I look forward to continuing it with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence.

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): Will the Home Secretary say a little more about the defence measures that we might have against such an attack taking place in the UK, and particularly about the ability of potential terrorists to get hold of, for example, a commercial vehicle?

Amber Rudd: We have particular assets that we use to combat such an attack. We have, for instance, the national barrier asset when the police assess that there is a risk of vehicle attacks. My hon. Friend may have seen those barriers—big plastic items set up outside areas of risk to combat exactly such an attack. We will make them available to areas where there are to be big gatherings, which are exactly the sorts of area that could be most vulnerable.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): I welcome the Home Secretary to her new role. Last year the Opposition joined the Government in supporting the introduction of measures to restrict the movements of jihadists returning to the UK. Can the Home Secretary say how often those powers have been used?

Amber Rudd: I am certainly aware that we have those powers, and we are using them. Of course, the best thing is to try to discourage such people from going in the first place, but we are also making sure that we use those powers to stop them when they come back, and potentially to arrest them. I am happy to write to the hon. Lady to give her more information about the numbers.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): I was privileged to attend an inter-faith Eid celebration dinner last night hosted by the Ahmadiyya community—a group that the new Prime Minister is aware of, and a fine example of a group teaching love, not hatred, and committed to helping local communities by raising hundreds of thousands of pounds for UK charities. Does the Home Secretary agree that we need to work with our Muslim communities to ensure that they are not targeted by hate crimes in the UK and that they are not linked to appalling attacks, which they condemn?

Mr Speaker: Order. People ought to show some sensitivity to the mores of the House. Forgive me, but that question was far too long.

Amber Rudd: The hon. Lady makes an important point about the role of communities and faith groups in making sure that the sort of terrorism we have seen, and the sort of hate that can sometimes apparently grow up so easily, is combated early on. I join her in congratulating that group.

UK's Nuclear Deterrent

4.15 pm

The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May): I beg to move,

That this House supports the Government's assessment in the 2015 National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review that the UK's independent minimum credible nuclear deterrent, based on a Continuous at Sea Deterrence posture, will remain essential to the UK's security today as it has for over 60 years, and for as long as the global security situation demands, to deter the most extreme threats to the UK's national security and way of life and that of the UK's allies; supports the decision to take the necessary steps required to maintain the current posture by replacing the current Vanguard Class submarines with four Successor submarines; recognises the importance of this programme to the UK's defence industrial base and in supporting thousands of highly skilled engineering jobs; notes that the Government will continue to provide annual reports to Parliament on the programme; recognises that the UK remains committed to reducing its overall nuclear weapon stockpile by the mid-2020s; and supports the Government's commitment to continue work towards a safer and more stable world, pressing for key steps towards multilateral disarmament.

The Home Secretary has just made a statement about the attack in Nice, and I am sure the whole House will join me in sending our deepest condolences to the families and friends of all those killed and injured in last Thursday's utterly horrifying attack in Nice—innocent victims brutally murdered by terrorists who resent the freedoms that we treasure and want nothing more than to destroy our way of life.

This latest attack in France, compounding the tragedies of the Paris attacks in January and November last year, is another grave reminder of the growing threats that Britain and all our allies face from terrorism. On Friday I spoke to President Hollande and assured him that we will stand shoulder to shoulder with the French people, as we have done so often in the past. We will never be cowed by terror. Though the battle against terrorism may be long, these terrorists will be defeated, and the values of *liberté, égalité* and *fraternité* will prevail.

I should also note the serious events over the weekend in Turkey. We have firmly condemned the attempted coup by certain members of the Turkish military, which began on Friday evening. Britain stands firmly in support of Turkey's democratically elected Government and institutions. We call for the full observance of Turkey's constitutional order and stress the importance of the rule of law prevailing in the wake of this failed coup. Everything must be done to avoid further violence, to protect lives and to restore calm. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has worked around the clock to provide help and advice to the many thousands of British nationals on holiday or working in Turkey at this time. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has spoken to the Turkish Foreign Minister, and I expect to speak to President Erdogan shortly.

Before I turn to our nuclear deterrent, I am sure the House will welcome the news that Japan's SoftBank Group intends to acquire UK tech firm ARM Holdings. I have spoken to SoftBank directly. It has confirmed its commitment to keep the company in Cambridge and to invest further to double the number of UK jobs over five years. This £24 billion investment would be the

largest ever Asian investment in the UK. It is a clear demonstration that Britain is open for business—as attractive to international investment as ever.

There is no greater responsibility as Prime Minister than ensuring the safety and security of our people. That is why I have made it my first duty in this House to move today's motion so that we can get on with the job of renewing an essential part of our national security for generations to come.

For almost half a century, every hour of every day, our Royal Navy nuclear submarines have been patrolling the oceans, unseen and undetected, fully armed and fully ready—our ultimate insurance against nuclear attack. Our submariners endure months away from their families, often without any contact with their loved ones, training relentlessly for a duty they hope never to carry out. I hope that, whatever our views on the deterrent, we can today agree on one thing: that our country owes an enormous debt of gratitude to all our submariners and their families for the sacrifices they make in keeping us safe. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear!"]

As a former Home Secretary, I am familiar with the threats facing our country. In my last post, I was responsible for counter-terrorism for over six years. I received daily operational intelligence briefings about the threats to our national security, I chaired a weekly security meeting with representatives of all the country's security and intelligence agencies, military and police, and I received personal briefings from the director-general of MI5. Over those six years as Home Secretary I focused on the decisions needed to keep our people safe, and that remains my first priority as Prime Minister.

The threats that we face are serious, and it is vital for our national interest that we have the full spectrum of our defences at full strength to meet them. That is why, under my leadership, this Government will continue to meet our NATO obligation to spend 2% of our GDP on defence. We will maintain the most significant security and military capability in Europe, and we will continue to invest in all the capabilities set out in the strategic defence and security review last year. We will meet the growing terrorist threat coming from Daesh in Syria and Iraq, from Boko Haram in Nigeria, from al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, from al-Shabaab in east Africa, and from other terrorist groups planning attacks in Pakistan and Afghanistan. We will continue to invest in new capabilities to counter threats that do not recognise national borders, including by remaining a world leader in cyber-security.

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that Ukraine would have been less likely to have lost a sizeable portion of its territory to Russia had it kept its nuclear weapons, and that there are lessons in that for us?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right that there are lessons. Some people suggest to us that we should actually be removing our nuclear deterrent. This has been a vital part of our national security and defence for nearly half a century now, and it would be quite wrong for us to go down that particular path.

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): I offer the Prime Minister many congratulations on her election. Will she be reassured that whatever she is

about to hear from our Front Benchers, it remains steadfastly Labour party policy to renew the deterrent while other countries have the capacity to threaten the United Kingdom, and that many of my colleagues will do the right thing for the long-term security of our nation and vote to complete the programme that we ourselves started in government?

The Prime Minister: I commend the hon. Gentleman for the words that he has just spoken. He is absolutely right. The national interest is clear. The manifesto on which Labour Members of Parliament stood for the general election last year said that Britain must remain “committed to a minimum, credible, independent nuclear capability, delivered through a Continuous At-Sea Deterrent.”

I welcome the commitment that he and, I am sure, many of his colleagues will be giving tonight to that nuclear deterrent by joining Government Members of Parliament in voting for this motion.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): I add my congratulations to the right hon. Lady on her new role. If keeping and renewing our nuclear weapons is so vital to our national security and our safety, does she accept that the logic of that position must be that every single other country must seek to acquire nuclear weapons, and does she really think that the world would be a safer place if it did? Our nuclear weapons are driving proliferation, not the opposite.

The Prime Minister: No, I do not accept that at all. I have to say to the hon. Lady that, sadly, she and some Labour Members seem to be the first to defend the country's enemies and the last to accept these capabilities when we need them.

None of this means that there will be no threat from nuclear states in the coming decades. As I will set out for the House today, the threats from countries such as Russia and North Korea remain very real. As our strategic defence and security review made clear, there is a continuing risk of further proliferation of nuclear weapons. We must continually convince any potential aggressors that the benefits of an attack on Britain are far outweighed by their consequences; and we cannot afford to relax our guard or rule out further shifts that would put our country in grave danger. We need to be prepared to deter threats to our lives and our livelihoods, and those of generations who are yet to be born.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): Of course, when SNP Members go through the Lobby tonight, 58 of Scotland's 59 MPs will be voting against this. What message is the Prime Minister sending to the people of Scotland, who are demonstrating, through their elected representatives, that we do not want Trident on our soil?

The Prime Minister: I have to say to the hon. Gentleman that that means that 58 of the 59 Scottish Members of Parliament will be voting against jobs in Scotland that are supported by the nuclear deterrent.

Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): I thank the Prime Minister for giving way and congratulate her on her appointment. She mentioned the security threat that the country faces from terrorism. What does

she say to those who say that it is a choice between renewing the Trident programme and confronting the terrorist threat?

The Prime Minister: I say that it is not a choice. This country needs to recognise that it faces a variety of threats and ensure that we have the capabilities that are necessary and appropriate to deal with each of them. As the Home Secretary has just made clear in response to questions on her statement, the Government are committed to extra funding and extra resource going to, for example, counter-terrorism policing and the security and intelligence agencies as they face the terrorist threat, but what we are talking about today is the necessity for us to have a nuclear deterrent, which has been an insurance policy for this country for nearly 50 years and I believe that it should remain so.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op) *rose*—

The Prime Minister: I would like to make a little progress before I take more interventions.

I know that there are a number of serious and very important questions at the heart of this debate, and I want to address them all this afternoon. First, in the light of the evolving nature of the threats that we face, is a nuclear deterrent really still necessary and essential? Secondly, is the cost of our deterrent too great? Thirdly, is building four submarines the right way of maintaining our deterrent? Fourthly, could we not rely on our nuclear-armed allies, such as America and France, to provide our deterrent instead? Fifthly, do we not have a moral duty to lead the world in nuclear disarmament, rather than maintaining our own deterrent? I will take each of those questions in turn.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): May I congratulate the Prime Minister on her surefootedness in bringing this motion before the House and at last allowing Parliament to make a decision in this Session? We will proudly stand behind the Government on this issue tonight. I encourage her to tell the Scots Nats that if they do not want those jobs in Scotland, they will be happily taken in Northern Ireland?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention and for the support that he and his colleagues will show tonight.

Mike Gapes: I congratulate the right hon. Lady on becoming Prime Minister. Will she confirm that, when the Labour Government of Clement Attlee took the decision to have nuclear weapons, they had to do so in a very dangerous world, and that successive Labour Governments kept those nuclear weapons because there was a dangerous world? Is it not the case that now is also a dangerous time?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. Of course, the last Labour Government held votes in this House on the retention of the nuclear deterrent. It is a great pity that there are Members on the Labour Front Bench who fail to see the necessity of the nuclear deterrent, given that in the past the Labour party has put the British national interest first when looking at the issue.

[*The Prime Minister*]

I want to set out for the House why our nuclear deterrent remains as necessary and essential today as it was when we first established it. The nuclear threat has not gone away; if anything, it has increased.

First, there is the threat from existing nuclear states such as Russia. We know that President Putin is upgrading his nuclear forces. In the past two years, there has been a disturbing increase in both Russian rhetoric about the use of nuclear weapons and the frequency of snap nuclear exercises. As we have seen with the illegal annexation of Crimea, there is no doubt about President Putin's willingness to undermine the rules-based international system in order to advance his own interests. He has already threatened to base nuclear forces in Crimea and in Kaliningrad, the Russian enclave on the Baltic sea that neighbours Poland and Lithuania.

Secondly, there is the threat from countries that wish to acquire nuclear capabilities illegally. North Korea has stated a clear intent to develop and deploy a nuclear weapon, and it continues to work towards that goal, in flagrant violation of a series of United Nations Security Council resolutions.

Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow North East) (SNP) *rose*—

The Prime Minister: I am going to make some progress. North Korea is the only country in the world to have tested nuclear weapons this century, carrying out its fourth test this year, as well as a space launch that used ballistic missile technology. It also claims to be attempting to develop a submarine-launch capability and to have withdrawn from the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. Based on the advice I have received, we believe that North Korea could already have enough fissile material to produce more than a dozen nuclear weapons. It also has a long-range ballistic missile, which it claims can reach America, and which is potentially intended for nuclear delivery. There is, of course, the danger that North Korea might share its technology or its weapons with other countries or organisations that wish to do us harm.

Thirdly, there is the question of future nuclear threats that we cannot even anticipate today. Let me be clear why this matters. Once nuclear weapons have been given up, it is almost impossible to get them back, and the process of creating a new deterrent takes many decades. We could not redevelop a deterrent fast enough to respond to a new and unforeseen nuclear threat, so the decision on whether to renew our nuclear deterrent hinges not just on the threats we face today, but on an assessment of what the world will be like over the coming decades.

It is impossible to say for certain that no such extreme threats will emerge in the next 30 or 40 years to threaten our security and way of life, and it would be an act of gross irresponsibility to lose the ability to meet such threats by discarding the ultimate insurance against those risks in the future. With the existing fleet of Vanguard submarines beginning to leave service by the early 2030s, and with the time it takes to build and test new submarines, we need to take the decision to replace them now.

Maintaining our nuclear deterrent is not just essential for our own national security; it is vital for the future security of our NATO allies.

Angus Robertson (Moray) (SNP): Last year, the then Minister for Defence Procurement, the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr Dunne), said that the cost of the replacement programme was

“being withheld as it relates to the formulation of Government policy and release would prejudice commercial interests.”

Given the scale of the decision that we are being asked to make, will the Prime Minister tell us the answer to that question—the through-life cost?

The Prime Minister: I am happy to do so. If the right hon. Gentleman will allow me to finish this section of my speech, I will come on to the cost in a minute.

Britain is going to leave the European Union, but we are not leaving Europe, and we will not leave our European and NATO allies behind. Being recognised as one of the five nuclear weapons states under the nuclear non-proliferation treaty confers on us unique responsibilities, because many of the nations that signed the treaty in the 1960s did so on the understanding that they were protected by NATO's nuclear umbrella, including the UK deterrent. Abandoning our deterrent would undermine not only our own future security, but that of our allies. That is not something that I am prepared to do.

Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con): I wonder whether the Prime Minister, with her very busy schedule, caught the interview on Radio 5 Live this morning with the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Owen Smith), who stated that he was a member of CND as a teenager, but then he grew up. Is not the mature and adult view that in a world in which we have a nuclear North Korea and an expansionist Russia, we must keep our at-sea independent nuclear deterrent?

The Prime Minister: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend, and I think he is right to point out that there are Opposition Members who support that view. Sadly, not many of them seem to be on the Front Bench, but perhaps my speech will change the views of some of the Front Benchers; we will see.

I said to the right hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) that I would come on to the question of cost, and I want to do that now. Of course, no credible deterrent is cheap, and it is estimated that the four new submarines will cost £31 billion to build, with an additional contingency of £10 billion. With the acquisition costs spread over 35 years, this is effectively an insurance premium of 0.2% of total annual Government spending. That is 20p in every £100 for a capability that will protect our people through to the 2060s and beyond. I am very clear that our national security is worth every penny.

Angus Robertson: I am grateful to the Prime Minister for taking a second intervention. I asked her a simple question the first time around. I think that she has concluded her confirmation of the through-life cost for Trident's replacement, but she did not say what that number was. Would she be so kind as to say what the total figure is for Trident replacement, including its through-life cost?

The Prime Minister: I have given the figures for the cost of building the submarines. I am also clear that the in-service cost is about 6% of the defence budget, or

about 13p in every £100 of Government spending. There is also a significant economic benefit to the renewal of our nuclear deterrent, which might be of interest to members of the Scottish National party.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): The Prime Minister quite rightly paid tribute to our submariners. Will she also pay tribute to the men and women working in our defence industries who will work on Successor? They are highly skilled individuals who are well paid, but such skills cannot just be turned on and off like a tap when we need them. Does she agree that it is vital for the national interest to keep these people employed?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman makes an incredibly important point. Our nuclear defence industry makes a major contribution to our defence industrial base. It supports more than 30,000 jobs across the United Kingdom, and benefits hundreds of suppliers across more than 350 constituencies. The skills required in this industry, whether in engineering or design, will keep our nation at the cutting edge for years to come. Along with the hon. Gentleman, I pay tribute to all those who are working in the industry and, by their contribution, helping to keep us safe.

David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend to her place as Prime Minister. Does she agree with me that, like the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock), I have quite a lot of people in my constituency who are working in the defence industry, the nuclear power industry and the science sector? Will it not be a kick in the teeth for my constituents if we do not agree to this deterrent today?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes a very important point. Some constituencies—obviously, Morecambe and Lunesdale, and Barrow and Furness—are particularly affected by this, but as I have just said, there are jobs across about 350 constituencies in this country that are related to this industry. If we were not going to renew our nuclear deterrent, those people would of course be at risk of losing their jobs as a result.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

The Prime Minister: I will give way to the right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake), and then I will make some progress.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): I hope that the Prime Minister will come on to explain how a like-for-like replacement for Trident complies with article 6 of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

The Prime Minister: I will come on to the whole question of nuclear proliferation a little later, if the right hon. Gentleman will just hold his fire.

Stephen Metcalfe (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): Will the Prime Minister confirm for me and the House that the vast majority of the cost involved will be invested in jobs, skills and businesses in this country over many decades? This is an investment in our own security. It is not about outsourcing, but about keeping things safe at home.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. This is about jobs here in the United Kingdom, and it is also about the development of skills here in the United Kingdom that will be of benefit to our engineering and design base for many years to come.

The decision will also specifically increase the number of jobs in Scotland. HM Naval Base Clyde is already one of the largest employment sites in Scotland, sustaining around 6,800 military and civilian jobs, as well as having a wider impact on the local economy. As the base becomes home to all Royal Navy submarines, the number of people employed there is set to increase to 8,200 by 2022. If hon. Members vote against today's motion, they will be voting against those jobs. That is why the Unite union has said that defending and securing the jobs of the tens of thousands of defence workers involved in the Successor submarine programme is its priority.

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): On the issue of jobs, there is a lot of steel in Successor submarines, so will the Prime Minister commit to using UK steel for these developments?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman might have noticed that the Government have looked at the Government procurement arrangements in relation to steel. Obviously, where British steel is good value, we would want it to be used. For the hon. Gentleman's confirmation, I have been in Wales this morning and one of the issues I discussed with the First Minister of Wales was the future of Tata and the work that the Government have done with the Welsh Government on that.

I will now turn to the specific question of whether building four submarines is the right approach, or whether there are cheaper and more effective ways of providing a similar effect to the Trident system. I think the facts are very clear. A review of alternatives to Trident, undertaken in 2013, found that no alternative system is as capable, resilient or cost-effective as a Trident-based deterrent. Submarines are less vulnerable to attack than aircraft, ships or silos, and they can maintain a continuous, round-the-clock cover in a way that aircraft cannot, while alternative delivery systems such as cruise missiles do not have the same reach or capability. Furthermore, we do not believe that submarines will be rendered obsolete by unmanned underwater vehicles or cyber-techniques, as some have suggested. Indeed, Admiral Lord Boyce, the former First Sea Lord and submarine commander, has said that we are more likely to put a man on Mars within six months than make the seas transparent within 30 years. With submarines operating in isolation when deployed, it is hard to think of a system less susceptible to cyber-attack. Other nations think the same. That is why America, Russia, China and France all continue to spend tens of billions on their own submarine-based weapons.

Delivering Britain's continuous at-sea deterrence means that we need all four submarines to ensure that one is always on patrol, taking account of the cycle of deployment, training, and routine and unplanned maintenance. Three submarines cannot provide resilience against unplanned refits or breaks in serviceability, and neither can they deliver the cost savings that some suggest they would, since large fixed costs for infrastructure, training and maintenance are not reduced by any attempt to cut

[The Prime Minister]

from four submarines to three. It is therefore right to replace our current four Vanguard submarines with four Successors. I will not seek false economies with the security of the nation, and I am not prepared to settle for something that does not do the job.

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con): I was listening carefully to the question from the leader of the Scottish National party about cost. Is it not clear that, whatever the cost, he and his party are against our nuclear deterrent? Scottish public opinion is clear that people in Scotland want the nuclear deterrent. When my right hon. Friend the Scottish Secretary votes to retain the nuclear deterrent tonight, he will be speaking for the people of Scotland, not the SNP.

The Prime Minister: I could not agree more with my right hon. Friend; he put that very well indeed.

Let me turn to the issue of whether we could simply rely on other nuclear armed allies such as America and France to provide our deterrent. The first question is how would America and France react if we suddenly announced that we were abandoning our nuclear capabilities but still expected them to put their cities at risk to protect us in a nuclear crisis. That is hardly standing shoulder to shoulder with our allies.

At last month's NATO summit in Warsaw, our allies made it clear that by maintaining our independent nuclear deterrent alongside America and France we provide NATO with three separate centres of decision making. That complicates the calculations of potential adversaries, and prevents them from threatening the UK or our allies with impunity. Withdrawing from that arrangement would weaken us now and in future, undermine NATO, and embolden our adversaries. It might also allow potential adversaries to gamble that one day the US or France might not put itself at risk to deter an attack on the UK.

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): It is all very well looking at the cost of building and running the submarines, but the cost of instability in the world if there is no counterbalance reduces our ability to trade and reduces GDP. This is not just about what it costs; it is about what would happen if we did not have this system and there was more instability in the world.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes a valid and important point, and this issue must be looked at in the round, not just as one set of figures.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate the Prime Minister on her appointment. I shall be voting for the motion this evening because I believe that the historical role of the Labour party and Labour Governments has been on the right side of this issue. I love the fact that she is showing strong support for NATO, but there is a niggle: have we the capacity and resources to maintain conventional forces to the level that will match our other forces?

The Prime Minister: The answer to that is yes—we are very clear that we face different threats and need different capabilities to face them. We have now committed

to 2% of GDP being spent on defence, and we have increased the defence budget and the money that we spend on more conventional forces.

George Kerevan (East Lothian) (SNP): I congratulate the Prime Minister on her new role, but let us cut to the chase: is she personally prepared to authorise a nuclear strike that could kill 100,000 innocent men, women and children?

The Prime Minister: Yes. The whole point of a deterrent is that our enemies need to know that we would be prepared to use it, unlike the suggestion that we could have a nuclear deterrent but not actually be willing to use it, which seemed to come from the Labour Front Bench.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): I am sure the Prime Minister is aware that Russia has 10 times the amount of tactical nuclear weapons as the whole of the rest of NATO. On a recent Defence Committee visit to Russia, we were told by senior military leaders that they reserved the right to use nuclear weapons as a first strike. Should that not make us very afraid if we ever thought of giving up our nuclear weapons?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady is absolutely right. As I pointed out earlier, Russia is also modernising its nuclear capability. It would be a dereliction of our duty, in terms of our responsibility for the safety and security of the British people, if we were to give up our nuclear deterrent.

We must send an unequivocal message to any adversary that the cost of an attack on our United Kingdom or our allies will always be far greater than anything it might hope to gain through such an attack. Only the retention of our own independent deterrent can do this. This Government will never endanger the security of our people and we will never hide behind the protection provided by others, while claiming the mistaken virtue of unilateral disarmament.

Let me turn to the question of our moral duty to lead nuclear disarmament. Stopping nuclear weapons being used globally is not achieved by giving them up unilaterally. It is achieved by working towards a multilateral process. That process is important and Britain could not be doing more to support this vital work. Britain is committed to creating the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons, in line with our obligations under the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): Will the Prime Minister give way?

The Prime Minister: I am going to make some more progress.

We play a leading role on disarmament verification, together with Norway and America. We will continue to press for key steps towards multilateral disarmament, including the entry into force of the comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty and for successful negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty. Furthermore, we are committed to retaining the minimum amount of destructive power needed to deter any aggressor. We have cut our nuclear stockpiles by over half since their cold war peak in the late 1970s. Last year, we delivered on our commitment

to reduce the number of deployed warheads on each submarine from 48 to 40. We will retain no more than 120 operationally available warheads and we will further reduce our stockpile of nuclear weapons to no more than 180 warheads by the middle of the next decade.

Britain has approximately 1% of the 17,000 nuclear weapons in the world. For us to disarm unilaterally would not significantly change the calculations of other nuclear states, nor those seeking to acquire such weapons. To disarm unilaterally would not make us safer. Nor would it make the use of nuclear weapons less likely. In fact, it would have the opposite effect, because it would remove the deterrent that for 60 years has helped to stop others using nuclear weapons against us.

Our national interest is clear. Britain's nuclear deterrent is an insurance policy we simply cannot do without. We cannot compromise on our national security. We cannot outsource the grave responsibility we shoulder for keeping our people safe and we cannot abandon our ultimate safeguard out of misplaced idealism. That would be a reckless gamble: a gamble that would enfeeble our allies and embolden our enemies; a gamble with the safety and security of families in Britain that we must never be prepared to take.

We have waited long enough. It is time to get on with building the next generation of our nuclear deterrent. It is time to take this essential decision to deter the most extreme threats to our society and preserve our way of life for generations to come. I commend this motion to the House.

4.48 pm

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): May I start by welcoming the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) and congratulating her on her appointment as Prime Minister? I wish her well in that position, and I am glad that her election was quick and short.

I commend the remarks the Prime Minister made about the horrific events in Nice. What happened was absolutely horrific: the innocent people who lost their lives. One hopes it will not be repeated elsewhere. I was pleased she mentioned the situation in Turkey, and I support her call for calm and restraint on all sides in Turkey. After the attempted coup, I called friends in Istanbul and Ankara and asked what was going on. The older ones felt it was like a repeat of the 1980 coup and were horrified that bombs were falling close to the Turkish Parliament. Can we please not return to a Europe of military coups and dictatorships? I endorse the Prime Minister's comments in that respect, and I pay tribute to the Foreign Office staff who helped British citizens caught up in the recent events in France and Turkey.

The motion today is one of enormous importance to this country and indeed the wider world. There is nothing particularly new in it—the principle of nuclear weapons was debated in 2007—but this is an opportunity to scrutinise the Government. The funds involved in Trident renewal are massive. We must also consider the complex moral and strategic issues of our country possessing weapons of mass destruction. There is also the question of its utility. Do these weapons of mass destruction—for that is what they are—act as a deterrent to the threats we face, and is that deterrent credible?

The motion says nothing about the ever-ballooning costs. In 2006, the MOD estimated that construction costs would be £20 billion, but by last year that had risen by 50% to £31 billion, with another £10 billion added as a contingency fund. The very respected hon. Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt) has estimated the cost at £167 billion, though it is understood that delays might have since added to those credible figures—I have seen estimates as high as over £200 billion for the replacement and the running costs.

James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con): Is not the true cost the one we remember every Remembrance Sunday—the millions of lives we lost in two world wars? Would the right hon. Gentleman care to estimate the millions of lives that would have been lost in the third conventional war that was avoided before 1989 because of the nuclear deterrent?

Jeremy Corbyn: We all remember, on Remembrance Sunday and at other times, those who lost their lives. That is the price of war. My question is: does our possession of nuclear weapons make us and the world more secure? [HON. MEMBERS: “Yes!”] Of course, there is a debate about that, and that is what a democratic Parliament does—it debates the issues. I am putting forward a point of view. The hon. Gentleman might not agree with it, but I am sure he will listen with great respect, as he always does.

Ian Paisley: In the past, the Labour leader's solution to a domestic security threat was to parley with the Provisional IRA. What would his tactics be in dealing with a threat to all the peoples of this nation?

Jeremy Corbyn: Towards the end of her speech, the Prime Minister mentioned the nuclear non-proliferation treaty and multilateral disarmament. I was interested in that. Surely we should start from the basis that we want, and are determined to bring about, a nuclear-free world. Six-party talks are going on with North Korea. China is a major economic provider to North Korea. I would have thought that the relationship with China and North Korea was the key to finding a way forward.

James Berry (Kingston and Surbiton) (Con): How would the right hon. Gentleman persuade my thousands of Korean constituents that it is a good idea to disarm unilaterally while their families and friends living in our ally South Korea face a constant nuclear threat from a belligerent regime over their northern border?

Jeremy Corbyn: I, too, have Korean constituents, as do many others, and we welcome their work and participation in our society. I was making the point that the six-party talks are an important way forward in bringing about a peace treaty on the Korean peninsula, which is surely in everybody's interests. It will not be easy—I fully understand that—but nevertheless it is something we should be trying to do.

I would be grateful if the Prime Minister, or the Defence Secretary when he replies, could let us know the Government's estimate of the total lifetime cost of what we are being asked to endorse today.

Mr Shailesh Vara (North West Cambridgeshire) (Con): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Jeremy Corbyn: No.

It is hardly surprising that in May 2009 an intense debate went on in the shadow Cabinet about going for a less expensive upgrade by converting to air-launched missiles. The right hon. Member for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames) said at the time that

“the arguments have not yet been had in public in nearly an adequate enough way to warrant the spending of this nation’s treasure on the scale that will be required.”—[*Official Report*, 20 April 2009; Vol. 491, c. 84.]

Seven years later, we are perhaps in the same situation.

The motion proposes an open-ended commitment to maintain Britain’s current nuclear capability for as long as the global security situation demands. We on the Opposition Benches, despite our differences on some issues, have always argued for the aim of a nuclear-free world. We might differ on how to achieve it, but we are united in our commitment to that end.

In 2007, my right hon. Friend the Member for Derby South (Margaret Beckett) embarked on a meaningful attempt to build consensus for multilateral disarmament. Will the Government address where these Successor submarines are going to be based? The people of Scotland have rejected Trident’s being based in Faslane naval base on the Clyde—the SNP Government are opposed to it, as is the Scottish Labour party.

We are debating not a nuclear deterrent but our continued possession of weapons of mass destruction. We are discussing eight missiles and 40 warheads, with each warhead believed to be eight times as powerful as the atomic bomb that killed 140,000 people in Hiroshima in 1945. We are talking about 40 warheads, each one with a capacity to kill more than 1 million people.

What, then, is the threat that we face that will be deterred by the death of more than 1 million people? It is not the threat from so-called Islamic State, with its poisonous death-cult that glories in killing as many people as possible, as we have seen brutally from Syria to east Africa and from France to Turkey. It has not deterred our allies Saudi Arabia from committing dreadful acts in Yemen. It did not stop Saddam Hussein’s atrocities in the 1980s or the invasion of Kuwait in 1990. It did not deter the war crimes in the Balkans in the 1990s, nor the genocide in Rwanda. I make it clear today that I would not take a decision that killed millions of innocent people. I do not believe that the threat of mass murder is a legitimate way to go about dealing with international relations.

Mr Jamie Reed (Copeland) (Lab): As Leader of the Opposition, my right hon. Friend will be privy to briefings from the National Security Council. Will he explain when he last sought and received such a briefing and what is his assessment of the new Russian military nuclear protocols that permit first strike using nuclear weapons and that say that they can be used to de-escalate conventional military conflicts?

Jeremy Corbyn: Britain, too, currently retains the right to first strike, so I would have thought that the best way forward would be to develop the nuclear non-proliferation treaty into a no first strike situation. That would be a good way forward. I respect my hon. Friend’s wish to live in a nuclear-free world. I know he believes that very strongly.

I think we should take our commitments under the nuclear non-proliferation treaty very seriously. In 1968, the Labour Government led by Harold Wilson inaugurated and signed the non-proliferation treaty. In 2007, the then Foreign Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Derby South rightly said that

“we must strengthen the NPT in all its aspects”

and referred to the judgment made 40 years ago

“that the eventual abolition of nuclear weapons was in all of our interests.”

The then Labour Government committed to reduce our stocks of operationally available warheads by a further 20%. I congratulate our Government on doing that. Indeed, I attended an NPT review conference when those congratulations were spoken. Can the Government say what the Labour Foreign Secretary said in 2007 when she said that her

“commitment to the vision of a world free of nuclear weapons is undimmed”?

Is this Government’s vision of a nuclear-free world undimmed? My right hon. Friend also spoke as Foreign Secretary of the

“international community’s clear commitment to a Middle East Nuclear Weapons Free Zone”.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Jeremy Corbyn: I will not give way.

Indeed, at the last two nuclear non-proliferation treaty five-yearly review conferences there was unanimous support for a weapons of mass destruction-free zone across the middle east, which surely we can sign up to and support. I look forward to the Defence Secretary’s support for that position when he responds to the debate.

Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): My right hon. Friend is speaking about previous party policy. At the shadow Cabinet meeting last Tuesday, it was agreed that current party policy would be conveyed by Front Benchers. When will we hear it?

Jeremy Corbyn: I thank my hon. Friend for his view. As he well knows, the party decided that it wanted to support the retention of nuclear weapons. We also decided that we would have a policy review, which is currently being undertaken by my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich South (Clive Lewis).

My hon. Friend the Member for Bermondsey and Old Southwark (Neil Coyle) is as well aware as I am of the existing policy. He is also as well aware as I am of the views on nuclear weapons that I expressed very clearly at the time of the leadership election last year, hence the fact that Labour Members will have a free vote this evening.

Other countries have made serious efforts—

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Jeremy Corbyn: I will come to my hon. Friend in a moment.

Other countries have made serious efforts to bring about nuclear disarmament within the terms of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. South Africa abandoned

all its nuclear programmes after the end of apartheid, and thus brought about a nuclear weapons-free zone throughout the continent. After negotiation, Libya ended all research on nuclear weapons. At the end of the cold war, Ukraine gave up its nuclear weapons, although they were under the control of the former Soviet Union and, latterly, of Russia. Kazakhstan did the same, which helped to bring about a central Asia nuclear weapons-free zone, and in Latin America, Argentina and Brazil both gave up their nuclear programmes.

I commend the Government, and other Governments around the world who negotiated with Iran, seriously, with great patience and at great length. That helped to encourage Iran to give up its nuclear programme, and I think we should pay tribute to President Obama for his achievements in that regard.

The former Conservative Defence Secretary Michael Portillo said:

“To say we need nuclear weapons in this situation would imply that Germany and Italy are trembling in their boots because they don't have a nuclear deterrent, which I think is clearly not the case.”

Is it not time for us to step up to the plate and promote—rapidly—nuclear disarmament?

Mr Kevan Jones: Like me, my right hon. Friend stood in May 2015 on the basis of a party policy which had been agreed at our conference, through our mechanisms in the party, and which supported the renewal of our continuous at-sea deterrent. He now has a shadow Front Bench and a shadow Cabinet in his own image, who, I understand, agreed last week to present that policy from the Front Bench. Is he going to do it, or will it be done by the Member who winds up the debate?

Jeremy Corbyn: My hon. Friend is well aware of what the policy was. He is also well aware that a policy review is being undertaken, and he is also well aware of the case that I am making for nuclear disarmament.

Caroline Lucas: As the right hon. Gentleman will know, a multilateral process is currently taking place at the United Nations. More than 130 countries are negotiating, in good faith, for a treaty to ban nuclear weapons. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the Government's refusal even to attend, let alone take part in, that process raises serious questions about their commitment to a world without nuclear weapons?

Jeremy Corbyn: I think it is a great shame that the Government do not attend those negotiations, and I wish they would. I thank them for attending the 2014 conference on the humanitarian effects of war, and I thank them for their participation in the non-proliferation treaty, but I think they should go and support the idea of a worldwide ban on nuclear weapons. No one in the House actually wants nuclear weapons. The debate is about how one gets rid of them, and the way in which one does it.

There are questions, too, about the operational utility of nuclear armed submarines. *[Interruption.]* I ask the Prime Minister again—or perhaps the Secretary of State for Defence can answer this question in his response—what assessment the Government have made of the impact of

underwater drones, the surveillance of wave patterns and other advanced detection techniques that could make the submarine technology—*[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Mr Shelbrooke, I want you to aspire to the apogee of statesmanship, but shrieking from a sedentary position, despite your magnificent suit, is not the way to achieve it. Calm yourself, man; I am trying to help you, even if you don't know it.

Jeremy Corbyn: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Can the Prime Minister confirm whether the UK will back the proposed nuclear weapons ban treaty, which I understand will be put before the UN General Assembly in September—probably before we return to the House after the summer recess? That is an important point.

Alberto Costa (South Leicestershire) (Con): We can all agree that nuclear weapons are truly the most repugnant weapons that have ever been invented by man, but the key is the word “invented”; we cannot disinvent them, but we can control them, and that is what this is all about—controlling nuclear weapons.

Jeremy Corbyn: If this is all about controlling them, perhaps we should think for a moment about the obligations we have signed up to as a nation by signing the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, article VI of which says that the declared nuclear weapons states—of which we are one—must take steps towards disarmament, and others must not acquire nuclear weapons. It has not been easy, but the NPT has helped to reduce the level of nuclear weapons around the world.

Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): I am stunned to hear the argument that has just been made from the Tory Benches that we cannot disinvent nuclear weapons. That argument could be employed for chemical and biological weapons.

Jeremy Corbyn: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. We have achieved the chemical weapons convention, a ban on cluster weapons and other things around the world through serious long-term negotiation.

Angela Smith: My right hon. Friend is fond of telling us all that the party conference is sovereign when it comes to party policy. Last year the party conference voted overwhelmingly in favour of maintaining the nuclear deterrent, so why are we not hearing a defence of the Government's motion?

Jeremy Corbyn: Party policy is also to review our policies. That is why we have reviews.

We also have to look at the issues of employment and investment. We need Government intervention through a defence diversification agency, as we had under the previous Labour Government, to support industries that have become over-reliant on defence contracts and wish to move into other contracts and other work.

The Prime Minister mentioned the Unite policy conference last week, which I attended. Unite, like other unions, has members working in all sectors of high-tech manufacturing, including the defence sector. That, of course, includes the development of both the submarines and the warheads and nuclear reactors that go into them.

[Jeremy Corbyn]

Unite's policy conference endorsed its previous position of opposing Trident but wanting a Government who will put in place a proper diversification agency. The union has been thinking these things through and wants to maintain the highly skilled jobs in the sector.

Our defence review is being undertaken by my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich South. I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry) for her excellent work on the review. [Interruption.] Whatever people's views—

Caroline Flint rose—

Jeremy Corbyn: All right, I will give way—[Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order. I think the right hon. Gentleman has signalled an intention to take an intervention, but before he does—[Interruption.] Order. I just make the point that there is a lot of noise, but at the last reckoning—[Interruption.] Order. I will tell the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr Skinner) what the position is, and he will take it whether he likes it or not. Fifty-three Members wish to speak in this debate, and I want to accommodate them. I ask Members to take account of that to help each other.

Caroline Flint: Under the last Labour Government, because of our stand on supporting non-proliferation, as a nuclear deterrent country we were able to influence a large reduction in the number of nuclear warheads around the world. Does my right hon. Friend really think that if we abandoned our position as one of the countries that holds nuclear weapons, we would have as much influence without them as with them?

Jeremy Corbyn: We did indeed help to reduce the number of nuclear warheads. Indeed, I attended a number of conferences where there were British Government representatives, and the point was made that the number of UK warheads had been reduced and other countries had been encouraged to do the same. I talked about the nuclear weapons-free zones that had been achieved around the world, which are a good thing. However, there is now a step change, because we are considering saying that we are prepared to spend a very large sum on the development of a new generation of nuclear weapons. I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to article VI of the NPT—I am sure she is aware of it—which requires us to “take steps towards disarmament”. That is what it actually says.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Jeremy Corbyn: I am not going to give way any more, because I am up against the clock.

In case it is not obvious to the House, let me say that I will be voting against the motion tonight. I am sure that will be an enormous surprise to the whole House. I will do that because of my own views and because of the way—

Mr Jamie Reed: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I apologise for having to interrupt the right hon. Gentleman, but we have a point of order.

Mr Reed: I seek your guidance, Mr Speaker, on the accuracy of the language used by the Leader of the Opposition. We are not voting tonight on new nuclear warheads; we are voting simply on the submarines used to deploy those missiles. That is fundamentally different from new missiles.

Mr Speaker: The answer to the hon. Gentleman is that it is up to each right hon. and hon. Member to read the motion, interpret it as he or she thinks fit, and make a judgment accordingly. It is not a matter for the Chair.

Jeremy Corbyn: The issue of course is the submarines, but it is also the new weapons that will have to go into those submarines as and when they have been built—if they are built.

We should pause for a moment to think about the indiscriminate nature of what nuclear weapons do and the catastrophic effects of their use anywhere. As I said, I have attended NPT conferences and preparatory conferences at various times over many years, with representatives of all parties in the House. I was very pleased when the coalition Government finally, if slightly reluctantly, accepted the invitation to take part in the humanitarian effects of war conference in Vienna in 2014. Anyone who attended that conference and heard from British nuclear test veterans, Pacific islanders or civilians in Russia or the United States who have suffered the effects of nuclear explosions cannot be totally dispassionate about the effects of the use of nuclear weapons. A nuclear weapon is an indiscriminate weapon of mass destruction.

Many colleagues throughout the House will vote for weapons tonight because they believe they serve a useful military purpose. But to those who believe in multilateral disarmament, I ask this: is this not an unwise motion from the Government, giving no answers on costs and no answers on disarmament? For those of us who believe in aiming for a nuclear-free world, and for those who are deeply concerned about the spiralling costs, this motion has huge questions to answer, and they have failed to be addressed in this debate. If we want a nuclear weapons-free world, this is an opportunity to start down that road and try to bring others with us, as has been achieved to some extent over the past few decades. Surely we should make that effort rather than go down the road the Government are suggesting for us this evening.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. In accordance with usual practice, no time limit on Back-Bench speeches will apply until after all the Front-Bench opening speeches have been made. That said, sensitivity to the very large demand is of the essence, and extreme self-discipline is required.

5.14 pm

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): I have often had the pleasure of debating this topic with the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn), both in and outside the House, but never in either of our wildest dreams or nightmares did we imagine that

one day he would end up as leader of the Labour party. It only goes to show the unpredictability of political developments.

After the Falklands war, opponents of our strategic deterrent often pointed out that our Polaris submarines had done nothing to deter Argentina from invading the islands. However, there never was and never will be any prospect of a democratic Britain threatening to launch our nuclear missiles except in response to the use of mass destruction weapons against us. But just because we would balk at threatening to launch nuclear weapons except when our very existence was at stake, that does not mean that dictators share our scruples, our values or our sense of self-restraint.

An example from history will do. Following the horror of the poison gas attacks in the first world war, it was widely expected that any future major conflict would involve large-scale aerial bombardments drenching cities and peoples with lethal gases. Why did Hitler not do that? Because Churchill had warned him that British stocks of chemical weapons greatly exceeded his own, and that our retaliation would dwarf anything that Nazi Germany could inflict. Poison gases are not mass destruction weapons, but nerve gases are, and Hitler seriously considered using them against the allies in 1943. He did not do so because his principal scientist, Otto Ambros, advised him that the allies had almost certainly invented them too. In fact, we had done no such thing and were horrified to discover the Nazi stocks of Tabun nerve gas at the end of the war. That was a classic example of a dictator being deterred from using a mass destruction weapon by the mistaken belief that we could retaliate in kind when actually we could not. Such examples show in concrete terms why the concept of deterrence is so important in constraining the military options available to dictators and aggressors.

I shall briefly list the five main military arguments in favour of continuing the specific British policy—pursued by successive Labour and Conservative Governments—of maintaining, at all times, a British minimum strategic nuclear retaliatory capacity.

The first military argument is that future military threats and conflicts will be no more predictable than those that engulfed us throughout the 20th century. That is the overriding justification for preserving the armed forces in peacetime as a national insurance policy. No one knows which enemies might confront us between the years 2030 and 2060—the anticipated lifespan of the Trident successor system—but it is highly probable that at least some of those enemies will be armed with mass destruction weapons.

Mr MacNeil: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr Lewis: No, I am sorry. I normally like to take interventions, but I will not, because of the time pressure.

The second argument is that it is not the weapons themselves that we have to fear but the nature of the regimes that possess them. Whereas democracies are generally reluctant to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear dictatorships—although they did against Japan in 1945—the reverse is not the case. Let us imagine a non-nuclear Britain in 1982 facing an Argentina in possession of a few tactical nuclear bombs and the means of delivering them. Retaking the islands by conventional means would have been out of the question.

The third argument is that the United Kingdom has traditionally played a more important and decisive role in preserving freedom than other medium-sized states have been able or willing to do. Democratic countries without nuclear weapons have little choice but to declare themselves neutral and hope for the best, or to rely on the nuclear umbrella of powerful allies. The United Kingdom is a nuclear power already, and it is also much harder to defeat by conventional means because of our physical separation from the continent.

The fourth argument is that our prominence as the principal ally of the United States, our strategic geographical position and the fact that we are obviously the junior partner might tempt an aggressor to risk attacking us separately. Given the difficulty of overrunning the United Kingdom with conventional forces, in contrast to our more vulnerable allies, an aggressor could be tempted to use one or more mass destruction weapons against us on the assumption that the United States would not reply on our behalf. Even if that assumption were false, the attacker would find out his terrible mistake when and only when it was too late for all concerned. An independently controlled British nuclear deterrent massively reduces the prospect of such a fatal miscalculation.

The fifth and final military argument is that no quantity of conventional forces can compensate for the military disadvantage that faces a non-nuclear country in a war against a nuclear-armed enemy. The atomic bombing of Japan is especially instructive not only because the Emperor was forced to surrender, but because of the reverse scenario: if Japan had developed atomic bombs and the allies had not, an invasion of Japan to end the war would have been out of the question. The reason why nuclear weapons deter more reliably than conventional ones, despite the huge destructiveness of conventional warfare, is that nuclear destruction is not only unbearable, but unavoidable once the missiles have been launched. The certainty and scale of the potential retaliation mean that no nuclear aggressor can gamble on success and on escaping unacceptable punishment.

Opponents of our Trident deterrent say that it can never be used. The two thirds of the British people who have endorsed our keeping nuclear weapons as long as other countries have them, and continue to endorse that in poll after poll—as well as in two general elections in the 1980s—are better informed. They understand that Trident is in use every day of the week. Its use lies in its ability to deter other states from credibly threatening us with weapons of mass destruction. Of course, the British nuclear deterrent is not a panacea and is not designed to forestall every kind of threat, such as those from stateless terrorist groups, but the threat that it is designed to counter is so overwhelming that no other form of military capability could manage to avert it.

If the consequence of possessing a lethal weapon is that nobody launches it, while the consequence of not possessing it is that someone who does launches it against us, which is the more moral thing to do—to possess the weapon and avoid anyone being attacked, or to renounce it and lay yourself and your country open to obliteration? If possessing a nuclear system and threatening to launch it in retaliation will avert a conflict in which millions would otherwise die, can it seriously be claimed that the more ethical policy is to renounce the weapon and let the millions meet their fate? Even if

[Dr Julian Lewis]

one argues that the threat to retaliate is itself immoral, is it as immoral as the failure to forestall so many preventable deaths?

Moral choices are, more often than not, choices to determine the lesser of two evils. The possession of the nuclear deterrent may be unpleasant, but it is an unpleasant necessity, the purpose of which lies not in its ever being fired but in its nature as the ultimate insurance policy against unpredictable, future, existential threats. It is the ultimate stalemate weapon, and in the nuclear age stalemate is the most reliable source of security available to us all.

5.23 pm

Angus Robertson (Moray) (SNP): May I begin by joining the Leader of the Opposition and the Prime Minister in their comments about the unhappy developments in both France and Turkey? I also understand that the Prime Minister needs to leave the debate shortly to attend to some important matters, so I will give her a wink when I finish the consensual stuff, which I want to start with—genuinely—because this is the first opportunity that I have had in the House to wish her well as Prime Minister. I also wish her husband, Philip, well. I do not know him, but we all know how important the support that we get at home is. It will be a test for both of them. We will not agree on many things, but where we do, we will, and where we do not, we will remain the effective Opposition in the House of Commons.

From my experience on the Intelligence and Security Committee I also know a little bit about the national security responsibilities that the Home Secretary has to enact, and the challenges get even bigger when one becomes Prime Minister. I wish her strength and wisdom in dealing with matters that are potentially life and death questions. Those are matters for the Home Secretary and for the Prime Minister and we wish her well.

I am pleased that the Prime Minister has led in this debate. That was not the plan of the Government. Perhaps in the new style of the new Government she thought that, on this important issue, she should lead, and we very much welcome that, because this is a huge matter. It will probably be the biggest spending decision by this Government. Given that—and I will come back to this—I find it utterly remarkable that, a number of hours into this debate, we still have no idea whatsoever of what the through-life costs of Trident replacement are. We can have different views on whether Trident is a good thing or a bad thing and on whether it is necessary, but I have asked the Prime Minister twice about that number. She has the opportunity to intervene on me now and give us that number. She is not going to intervene, because she would prefer not to say it. It is for her to explain. No doubt, her special advisers will be asked by the fourth estate why it is that the Government are asking us to vote for something, but cannot tell us how much it will cost. It is remarkable that in this, the biggest—

Simon Hoare: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Angus Robertson: I will take an intervention from the Prime Minister, unless the hon. Gentleman can give us that number. Can he give that number to the House now? [HON. MEMBERS: “No!”]

Simon Hoare: I was merely going to ask the right hon. Gentleman what would be the cost at which he would he support it? This is not a matter of money and spending for him. That is a smokescreen.

Angus Robertson: I will help the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues: there are no circumstances in which we would spend any money on nuclear weapons. This is a motion before the House, which has been proposed by the Government, and which the hon. Gentleman and his hon. and right hon. Friends are being asked to support in the Lobby. The last time I looked, I thought that Conservative MPs took pride in fiscal rectitude and in making good decisions with taxpayers' money. It is remarkable that not a single one of them has insisted that those on their Front Bench tell us this evening what the biggest spending decision of this Parliament is going to cost. I ask again: will anybody on the Treasury Bench enlighten the House? Anybody? Again, answer came there none.

Incidentally, I have not yet ended with the consensual stuff. I am sorry, but I got a little ahead of myself—my apologies. I want to make the point about something that has not been brought up thus far. Perhaps it is the reason why the Prime Minister is here today—it would not surprise me. One of the first things that a Prime Minister needs to do on taking office is to write four letters. I am not asking what the Prime Minister has written or is writing in those letters. She writes a letter to the four submarine commanders, and we pay tribute to those who serve in our name. The husband of one of our number on the Scottish National party Benches served as a submariner on a Trident submarine. He was one of the last people to fire one of those missiles in testing. Incidentally, I should say that he is now an SNP councillor, and is opposed to the renewal of Trident.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Angus Robertson: Forgive me. I was just mentioning my hon. Friend.

Carol Monaghan: I thank my right hon. Friend for mentioning my husband, who did fire the Trident missile. Not only is he an SNP councillor, but he is in Parliament today and is a member of Scottish CND. I have made this point before. We support the personnel working on these submarines absolutely 100%, but not all of those personnel support the weapon they have been asked to deliver.

Angus Robertson: My hon. Friend makes her point very well.

Still remaining on the consensual side of this important debate, I want to stress that SNP Members do not confuse those who are in favour of renewing Trident with the thought that they would actually want to kill millions of people. However, as the Prime Minister has confirmed from the Dispatch Box today, the theory of nuclear deterrence is based on the credible potential use of weapons of mass destruction. Those who vote for its renewal need to square the theory with the practice of what that actually means.

Having said all of that, given the boldness of the Prime Minister's recent personnel decisions, she has clearly been thinking about new ways of taking things forward.

In that respect, it is hugely disappointing that she clearly has not taken any time to consider—perhaps to reconsider—the wisdom of spending an absolute fortune on something that can never be used and is not deterring the threats that we face today. I say again that we have not yet had any confirmation of what the Government plan to spend on this; they expect Members on both the Labour Benches and the Government Benches to sign a blank cheque for it.

I am sorry that the Prime Minister has clearly not given any new or detailed consideration to embracing the non-replacement of Trident, which would offer serious strategic and economic benefits, as outlined in the June 2013 report, “The Real Alternative”. Those who have not read the report should do so.

In the previous debate that took place in this House on 20 January 2015—a debate called by the SNP on Trident replacement, with support from Plaid Cymru and the Green party, and I think I am right in saying that it was co-sponsored by the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn)—we outlined the advantages, including

“improved national security—through budgetary flexibility in the Ministry of Defence and a more effective response to emerging security challenges in the 21st century”

as well as

“improved global security—through a strengthening of the non-proliferation regime, deterring of nuclear proliferation and de-escalation of international tensions”.

There are also potential

“vast economic savings—of more than £100 billion over the lifetime of a successor nuclear weapons system, releasing resources for effective security spending, as well as a range of public spending priorities”.—[*Official Report*, 20 January 2015; Vol. 591, c. 92.]

This seems to be pretty important, given that, when the Ministry of Defence was asked about it in a written question in February 2015, the then Defence Minister, the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr Dunne), who is not in his place but was here earlier—I gave him notice that I would be raising this matter—replied that the estimated annual spending on the Trident replacement programme beyond maingate in 2016 was

“being withheld as it relates to the formulation of Government policy and release would prejudice commercial interests.”

Here today we are part and parcel of formulating Government policy, and we are expected to sign a blank cheque. We have absolutely no idea what the final cost will be. The hon. Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt), the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, has made a calculation—perhaps he will speak about it, if he catches your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker. He worked out that the in-service costs of a missile extension—the total cost of the Trident replacement programme—would be £167 billion.

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): Let me dispose of this part of my speech. The updated figure is now £179 billion—these are the Government’s own figures—based on capital costs of £31 billion, with a £10 billion contingency, and the Government’s assumption of about 6% of the defence budget as running costs, assuming a 32-year in-service life. That comes to a total of £179 billion.

Angus Robertson: I thank the hon. Gentleman. That is a very helpful intervention. I am not sure whether those numbers take account of the currency fluctuations

that have had an impact on sterling—they do not. I see the hon. Gentleman shaking his head, so we should assume that the total cost is even higher than £179 billion. A calculation was made in May this year which suggested that it would be £205 billion. That is a massive sum. The Defence Secretary is shaking his head, but would he like to intervene on me now and tell us the number?

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that in response to a freedom of information request on the full-life costs, the MOD said:

“The government needs a safe space away from the public gaze to allow it to consider policy options . . . unfettered from public comment about the affordability”?

Angus Robertson: I suppose we should ask ourselves whether that “safe space” is the House of Commons. We are none the wiser. We have asked again and again and again. I am looking at the Defence Secretary again and he has the opportunity to intervene on me now to tell Parliament how much money his Government wish to invest in the Successor programme. Update, there came none.

It is not just about the cost; for us in Scotland, it is also about democracy. The people of Scotland have shown repeatedly, clearly and consistently that we are opposed to the renewal of nuclear weapons. When the SNP went to the country—the electorate—on an explicitly anti-Trident manifesto commitment, we won elections in 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2016. I am delighted to be joined on the Front Bench by my hon. Friend the Member for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O’Hara), who represents Faslane and Coulport because the electorate of Argyll and Bute preferred an SNP parliamentarian, elected on a non-Trident platform, to a Conservative, Labour or Liberal Democrat MP.

However, this is much, much more than an issue of party political difference, because in Scottish public and civic life, from the Scottish Trades Union Congress, to Scotland’s Churches—the Church of Scotland and the Bishops’ Conference, which issued a statement this week—to the Scottish Parliament, which has voted on the subject, all have voted or called for opposition to Trident renewal. There is cross-party support from not just the SNP, but the Greens and Scottish Labour. Almost every single one of Scotland’s MPs will vote tonight against Trident’s replacement.

It is an indictment of the new Administration that the first motion in Parliament is on renewing Trident when there are so many other pressing issues facing the country in the context of Brexit. It is obscene that the priority of this Government, and, sadly, too many people on the Labour Benches, at a time of Tory austerity and economic uncertainty following the EU referendum, is to spend billions of pounds on outdated nuclear weapons that we do not want, do not need and could never use. With debt, deficit and borrowing levels forecast to get worse after Brexit, and with more than £40 billion to be cut from public services by 2020, spending £167 billion, £179 billion, or £205 billion—whatever the number is that the Government are not prepared tell us—is an outrage. The Prime Minister’s first vote is on Trident. In the current climate, that is totally wrong. It is the wrong approach to key priorities. We should be working to stabilise the economy and sorting out the chaos caused by the Brexit result.

[Angus Robertson]

The Prime Minister has already undermined the words of her first speech, which many people, across all parties, found important. She vowed to fight “burning injustice”, and we agree, but Trident fights no injustices. Trident is an immoral, obscene and redundant weapons system.

The vote on Trident is one of the most important this Parliament will ever take, and the Government have an obligation to inform the public about such a massive decision—they have failed to do that. The Labour Opposition is facing three ways at the same time and letting the Government get away with this. We in the SNP are absolutely clear in our opposition to Trident. We would not commit to spending hundreds of billions of pounds on weapons of mass destruction, particularly at a time when this Government are making significant cuts to public services—it would be morally and economically indefensible.

Vernon Coaker (Gedling) (Lab): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Angus Robertson: I am summing up.

Today, almost every single Scottish MP will vote against renewing Trident nuclear missiles. Only a few short weeks ago, Scotland voted to remain in the European Union. If Scotland is a nation—and Scotland is a nation—it is not a normal situation for the state to totally disregard the wishes of the people. The Government have a democratic deficit in Scotland and, with today's vote on Trident, it is going to get worse, not better. It will be for the Scottish people to determine whether we are properly protected in Europe and better represented by a Government that we actually elect. At this rate, that day is fast approaching.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. Before I call the Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee, I remind hon. Members that there is a five-minute limit on speeches. If too many interventions are taken, then the limit will reduce very rapidly.

5.39 pm

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): Because I suspect that I may be the only person on the Conservative Benches to make the arguments that I am going to make, I have taken some care with them. Given the time limit, I will not be able to deploy my full arguments here, but I will publish them on my website, because I know that many people will be following this debate. I agree with the right hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) that it is an extremely important debate.

It is because I care about the security of my country that I will not be joining my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Lobby tonight. Because we have capped defence expenditure at 2% of GDP, the cost of this programme comes at the expense of the rest of the defence programme. Therefore, we need to make a more rational judgment about the balance of expenditure in order to meet the risks that our country faces. This is a colossal investment in a weapons system that will become increasingly vulnerable and at which we will have to throw good money—tens of billions of pounds more than already estimated—in order to try to keep it safe in the years to come.

Mr Harper: I am listening carefully to my hon. Friend's remarks. He said that we have capped defence expenditure at 2% of GDP. My understanding is that we have a floor for defence spending of at least 2% of GDP. I do not think that he is factually right.

The Secretary of State for Defence (Michael Fallon) *indicated assent.*

Mr Harper: I see the Secretary of State for Defence nodding at my remarks.

Crispin Blunt: My right hon. Friend is technically right, but it would be a triumph of hope over expectation that we are going to see more than 2% spent on defence any time soon. When that happens, and if this is taken in isolation, to be spent outside the defence budget, then I will accept that my arguments need to be re-evaluated, but as things are set now, the budget for this weapons system comes at the cost of the rest of our defence budget.

Britain's independent possession of nuclear weapons has turned into a political touchstone for commitment to national defence, but this is an illusion. The truth is that this is a political weapon aimed, rather effectively, at the Labour party. Its justification rests on the defence economics, the politics, and the strategic situation of over three decades ago, but it is of less relevance to the United Kingdom today, and certainly surplus to the needs of NATO. It does not pass any rational cost-effectiveness test. Surely the failures in conventional terms, with the ignominious retreats from Basra and Helmand in the past decade, tell us that something is badly out of balance in our strategic posture.

Let us not forget the risks that this weapons system presents to the United Kingdom. Basing it in Scotland reinforces the nationalist narrative, and ironically, for a system justified on the basis that it protects the United Kingdom, it could prove instrumental in the Union's undoing.

We were told last November that the capital cost for the replacement of the four Vanguard submarines would be £31 billion, with a contingency fund of £10 billion. We have been told that the running costs of the Successor programme will be 6% of the defence budget. Following the comments of the right hon. Member for Moray, my latest calculation is £179 billion for the whole programme.

Mr Kevan Jones: The hon. Gentleman's figure is now being used widely. I asked the House of Commons Library and various think-tanks whether they could break it down. They have been unable to do so. Could he explain how he gets to that figure?

Crispin Blunt: Yes, it is extremely straightforward. It is 6% of 2% of GDP on the basis of the Government's proposed in-service dates of the system. The defence budget is 2% of GDP, and this is 6% of that share. That presents us with the number. It is not surprising that the number should be 6% of GDP, which is double the share of the defence budget in the 1980s, because the share of GDP spent on defence has halved since the 1980s.

The costs of this project are enormous. I have asked privately a number of my hon. Friends at what point they believe that those costs become prohibitive. I cannot get an answer, short of, “Whatever it takes,” but I do not

believe that an answer of infinity is rational. It is not only damaging to our economic security; it also comes at a deeply injurious opportunity cost to conventional defence. At what point do either of those prices cease to be worth paying?

The costs are likely to rise much further. The standard programme risks, which are already apparent with the Astute programme, and the currency risk pale when compared with the technical risk of this project. There is a growing body of evidence that emerging technologies will render the seas increasingly transparent in the foreseeable future. Under development are distributed sensors detecting acoustic, magnetic, neutrino and electromagnetic signatures, on board unmanned vehicles in communication with each other, using swarming algorithms and autonomous operations associated with artificial intelligence, able to patrol indefinitely and using the extraordinary processing capabilities now available and improving by the month. The geometric improvement in processing power means that that technology in today's smartphone is far superior to that of the latest American fighter aircraft. Furthermore, unmanned aircraft will detect the surface weight of deeply submerged submarines communicating with those underwater receiving active sonar. Marine biologists are already able to track shoals of fish in real time from several hundred miles away.

Ballistic submarines depend utterly on their stealth by utilising the sheer size of the oceans, but if we are today able to detect the gravitational waves first created by big bang, how can we be so confident that a capable adversary would not be able to track our submarines 20 to 40 years from now? The system vulnerabilities are not restricted to its increasingly detectable signatures. What about the security of the Trident system against cyber-attack?

Part of the Government's case is that all the other P5 states are also investing in submarine technology for their nuclear weapon systems. It would not be the first time that states have followed each other down a dreadnought blind alley, but the UK is the only nuclear-armed state to depend entirely on a submarine. If NATO's technical head of anti-submarine warfare can foresee the end of the era of the submarine, our P5 colleagues will at least have their bets laid off. We won't.

5.47 pm

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to follow that imaginative speech by the hon. Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt). I only wish he had brought in his fag packet so that we could have better understood the figures he tried to explain, but to no avail.

I am proud, unlike the people who are acting for our Front Bench today, to speak for the Labour party in this debate. It is the party of Attlee and Bevin, Nye Bevan and Stafford Cripps—the men who witnessed the terrible birth of nuclear destruction and understood, with heavy hearts, that they should protect the world by building the capacity to deter others from unleashing it again.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): I thank my friend for giving way. A nuclear deterrent also protects our soldiers in the field. Many of us, including my hon. Friend

the Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt), were soldiers in Germany. We took great comfort from the fact that we had nuclear weapons, because the other side—the Warsaw pact—could well have blasted us to hell, but they were put off, we hope very much, by the fact that we possessed nuclear weapons. Protection of our soldiers matters and is good for morale.

John Woodcock: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. Those who wish to eradicate nuclear weapons from the United Kingdom cannot explain what would happen if, for example, Russia invaded a NATO state and there was no nuclear protection from our side and we were open to nuclear blackmail on a dreadful scale.

I am pleased to stand alongside members of Unite and GMB who have come down here to remind us of just how effective the workforce is and how important they are to so many parts of the United Kingdom. I am also proud that I will be in the same Lobby as the former Labour Foreign Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Derby South (Margaret Beckett), who committed the United Kingdom—the first time any nuclear-capable nation had done so—to a global zero: a world free from nuclear weapons. But—the Leader of the Opposition did not seem to want to mention this—she knew that unilaterally disarming while others keep the bomb is not an act of global leadership. That would not show others the way; it would be destabilising and a futile abdication of responsibility.

I also speak for the Labour Members and trade unionists who engaged in our policy making in good faith. Those people are now being ignored by the party leader, who clings to an idea of Labour party democracy to save his own skin, and that is not right. The party leader's Trident review has never quite materialised, so let me mention the report of the Back-Bench Labour defence committee, which I chair. After hearing from 23 expert witnesses in 10 sessions, which many MPs attended—although not the shadow Foreign Secretary, anyone from the office of the Leader of the Opposition or the shadow International Development Secretary, who seems to want to take part in the debate via Twitter but who does not, apparently, want to stand up for herself—we found that there had been no substantive change in the circumstances that led the Labour party firmly to support renewing the Vanguard class submarines that carry the deterrent.

For the official Opposition to have a free vote on a matter of such strategic national importance is a terrible indictment of how far this once great party has fallen. There has long been a principled tradition of unilateralism in the Labour party. I was born into it, as the son of a Labour party member who protested at Greenham common. But what Labour's current Front Benchers are doing is not principled. It shows contempt for the public and for party members. In what they say, Labour's Front Benchers often show contempt for the truth. The situation would have been abhorrent even to Labour's last great unilateralist, Michael Foot—a man who, for all his shortcomings as a leader, would never have allowed our party to stand directionless in the face of such an important question.

We do not know what is going to happen to the Labour party; this is an uncertain time. Whatever happens, I am proud to stand here today and speak for Barrow. I am proud to speak for the town that is steeped in the

[John Woodcock]

great British tradition of shipbuilding, and to speak for the men and women who give great service to their country with the incredible work that they do. So I will walk through the Aye Lobby tonight to vote in favour of a project that the last Labour Government began, in a vote that Labour itself promised when we sat on the Government Benches.

Failing to endorse a submarine programme that will support up to 30,000 jobs across the UK would not only do great damage to our manufacturing base; it would be a clear act of unilateral disarmament. It would tell the public that we are prepared to give more credence to improbable theories and wild logic than to the solid weight of evidence that points to renewing Trident. It is our enduring duty to do what we can to protect the nation for decades ahead, so I hope my colleagues will join me in supporting established Labour policy in the Aye Lobby tonight.

5.53 pm

Richard Benyon (Newbury) (Con): That was one of the most courageous speeches I have heard during my time in the House.

I am very sad that the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) is not here. When we last debated the matter in 2007, he was in his place and I was sitting on the Opposition Benches. He swept his arm to his right and said that we in the home counties could not understand what it was like to have such a powerful weapon on our doorsteps. I pointed out to him that if he came into my bedroom and looked across the Kennet valley, he would see the rooftops of the Atomic Weapons Establishment at Aldermaston; if he looked slightly to his left, he would see the rooftops of the Royal Ordnance Factory at Burghfield; and if he climbed on to my roof, he could probably see the missile silos at Greenham common. In my part of Berkshire, we need no lessons from anyone about the impact or the effect of living close to the nuclear deterrent. He replied as consummately as clever politicians do, that that was the first and last time he would ever be asked into a Tory MP's bedroom.

The point is that the nuclear deterrent is my constituency's largest employer, and it brings many advantages, not least to the supply chain of 275 local companies and 1,500 supply chain organisations nationally. Add to that its role in advising the Government on counter-terrorism; the effect it has on nuclear threat reduction, on forensics—not least in the recent Litvinenko inquiry—and on non-proliferation; its second-to-none apprenticeship scheme; and its academic collaboration with the Orion laser. None of that would matter one jot if the decision we were taking today was wrong. The decision we are taking today is right.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): I have listened with great interest to what the hon. Gentleman has said about the situating of nuclear materials and weapons in his constituency. Does he agree that there is one big difference between his constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O'Hara)? The hon. Gentleman's constituents—witness his election—want nuclear weapons. The constituents of my hon. Friend, and those of all my hon. Friends, do not want nuclear weapons.

Richard Benyon: There are many polls that conflict with the information that the hon. and learned Lady provides. I was elected on a resounding majority, but who knows how much of that decision was about nuclear weapons being based locally? I think it was about a wide variety of issues.

The truth is that the nuclear deterrent has saved lives—this is a point that has not been made enough tonight—over the past few decades, because aggressors have been deterred. We have to ask ourselves how predictable future conflicts are. The leader of the SNP said that we are talking about deterrence today. We are not; we are talking about deterrence for 20 years, 30 years or 40 years. The SNP may have a crystal ball, and SNP Members may be able to say that there will be no threats to us in that time. I do not have a crystal ball, however, and I want to ensure the protection of future generations in this country.

Stephen Gethins (North East Fife) (SNP): Will the hon. Gentleman tell us what role these nuclear weapons played in the catastrophes in Libya and Syria? What contribution did they make?

Richard Benyon: That was a totally ridiculous intervention, which is not worthy of a reply. The hon. Gentleman might like to consider what kind of aggressor we might face in the future. We are not just talking about a resurgent Russia. What about groups of nations or individual nations? We know that nuclear weapons have proliferated in recent years. As we have reduced our arsenal, others have increased theirs. He needs to think not just about today, and not just about himself and his constituents, but about the future generations whom we are talking about protecting.

Ian Blackford: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Richard Benyon: No, I will not take any more interventions.

We have to think through the recent conflicts in our lifetime: not conflicts in which nuclear retaliation would ever have been appropriate, but the Yom Kippur war, the Falklands—mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis)—the invasion of Kuwait, 9/11 and even last week's coup in Turkey. We did not know that they were going to happen. Who can say that we would be any the wiser in the event of a coup de main operation that might not have happened if the potential enemy had been deterred by our possession of weapons that made them sit up and think? We need potential enemies to hold in their mind the fact that there is no advantage to them in aggression.

I have spoken tonight about our constituents and about future generations, but let us also talk about the concept of using nuclear weapons. There is a good, honest and decent concept, which goes back many generations and which I can respect, of disarmament and pacifism in this country. I happen to think that in this context it is wrong, but we can respect it. When people talk about using nuclear weapons, they need to understand the doctrine that governs them. Our nuclear deterrent has been used every single day of every single year for which it has been deployed. It does what it says on the tin; it deters.

I am sorry to say it, but no one believes that an independent Scotland would suddenly start to invest in Type 26 destroyers, fast jets and all the other paraphernalia

of a nation that somehow wants to engage in the world in the way that Britain does. SNP Members' sudden attraction to the idea of massive defence spending is complete nonsense.

Ian Blackford: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Richard Benyon: No, I will not give way.

The nature of regimes in a more dangerous world is what we need to consider today. Although we have reduced our arsenal of nuclear weapons by 50% in recent years—the Leader of the Opposition completely ignored the fact that we have reduced our arsenal so considerably—the number of states with nuclear weapons has increased and the number of tactical nuclear weapons in the world is now over 17,000.

On the question of cost, I would just state that all this—the £31 billion over 35 years, plus the contingency—translates to about 0.2% of total Government spending. That will be reduced if we take account of the advantage for the supply chain of developing this suite of replacement submarines.

I will finish by saying that we need to listen to our allies on this issue. We have an agreement with the French—the Lancaster House agreement—and we have a long-standing agreement with the United States. Our nuclear defence is networked into our other allies as well. We need to think about their response to what we are debating as much as about the future generations that we will protect through our decision tonight.

6.1 pm

Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): Until three weeks ago, I anticipated that I would speak in this debate as Labour's shadow armed forces Minister, but today I do so from the Back Benches. Either way, however, I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock) for the work he did to ensure Labour's approach to this debate was evidence based. In his capacity as chair of the PLP defence committee, he conducted an exhaustive series of seminars on the Vanguard renewal, with a wide body of contributors. We heard from the general secretary of CND, the Minister for Defence Procurement, two former Labour Secretaries of State for Defence, trade unions, firms responsible for the thousands of jobs that today hang in the balance, and academics and historians who placed the decision we face today in an appropriate global strategic and historical context.

I, too, have a historical context here. Back in the 1980s, my mother was a Greenham Common protester.

John Woodcock: Mine too.

Toby Perkins: That is something else we have in common. I believe that both my parents were members of CND. I do not think I ever had the badge, but as a 13-year-old I certainly made some of the arguments we heard from our Front Bench a few moments ago. As with much of the discourse in the Labour party now, we are having a retro debate that we thought had been settled three decades ago. We have previously fought

general elections on a unilateralist platform. Some people surrounding the Labour party leader may think that winning elections is just the small bit that matters to political elites, but to most of us—and indeed to my constituents—it is pretty fundamental to delivering the change our society needs.

My instinct was that the policy on which we fought the previous election was the correct one, but I none the less approached the review with an open mind. I heard all the tried-and-tested arguments in opposition to Trident, but I have to say that the weight of evidence in support of the decision the Government are taking today was overwhelming.

I was told many things. I was told that once I got to meet senior military figures, I would learn that none of them really wanted this and all wanted the money to go elsewhere. That simply was not true. From a range of experienced and expert opinion, I heard time and again that our armed forces recognise the strategic importance of sending a powerful message to our adversaries, of the geopolitical role that a credible nuclear deterrent plays and of its importance to our relationship with our NATO allies.

In the past nine months, I have visited NATO with two previous shadow Secretaries of State for Defence. We met representatives from Estonia, Latvia, Poland and several other NATO allies. For those countries, the Russian threat is not a dinner table conversation, but a matter of chilling daily reality. My hon. Friend the Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry) was told how desperate they were for Britain to retain the nuclear deterrent and send a powerful signal to President Putin.

We were also told that it was too soon to make a decision, but Lord West made it clear to the PLP defence committee that, because of the existing extension to the lifetime of the Vanguard class of submarines, further delays to the programme would mean that we could no longer maintain a permanent and continuous posture.

As the case for not having Trident has fallen apart, the alternative options we have heard proposed have become ever more absurd. First, we had "Build the submarines, but don't equip them with nuclear capability", which would involve all the spending, but none of the strategic benefit. Secondly, we were told we could re-perform the exhaustive Trident alternatives review and have another five years of indecision to match the period provided by the coalition Government.

The hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O'Hara) told us that all his constituents do not want this. However, only 44% of his constituents voted for a party that wants to get rid of Trident, while 56% voted for parties committed to the retention of Trident, so that does not stand up to scrutiny in the way he suggests.

The most depressing exchange was with representatives of the GMB union in Barrow, when my hon. Friend the Member for Islington South and Finsbury suggested that they might like to make wind turbines instead. They politely but firmly informed her that they were involved in designing and producing one of the most complex pieces of technology on the face of the earth, and that wind turbines had already been invented.

The House is being asked today to take a difficult and a costly decision.

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his speech. He will have heard, as I have done, the case that many people have put to Labour MPs—that they do not back unilateralism, but would prefer an alternative nuclear weapons platform. What consideration did he give to those points when he represented us on the Front Bench?

Toby Perkins: That is a very important point. In fact, the Government tried to come to precisely that conclusion on behalf of the Liberal Democrat allies in the previous Government. The truth of the matter is that having a ballistic missile system based on submarines is crucial to ensuring that it is undetectable by our adversaries and that it provides a genuine and creditable deterrent in relation to our adversaries' missile defence systems.

Labour Members should have confidence that the world-class technology produced by the very best of British manufacturing, which benefits suppliers in almost every constituency in the land—including, I am proud to say, at Cathelco in Chesterfield—is delivering the minimum credible continuous deterrent that we can deliver. It will aid global security and be viewed with great gratitude not just by the workers whose livelihoods depend on it, but by partners who are nervously watching our adversaries' every move. Labour Members should know that they are voting in accordance with the policy they were elected on and in support of working trade union members and our heroic armed forces personnel; that they are contributing towards global security; that backing Vanguard is in keeping with our internationalist principles; and that it is the right thing to do.

6.7 pm

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): I rise to support the motion, and I do so joylessly and with a heavy heart. Nobody can stand in a missile compartment of a ballistic submarine without a sense of terrible awe; our warheads have the capacity to destroy 40 million people. I know that everyone in the Chamber feels that responsibility extremely acutely, and that certainly goes for my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench and their predecessors.

I spent much of my 20-year naval career at the tail end of the cold war. The cold war is over, however, and one can say it was won. The cold war did not become a real war, in part because of the terrible weapons that we are discussing this afternoon. We must not be preparing to fight the last war. Right hon. and hon. Members throughout the House are right to say that tomorrow's wars are likely to be asymmetric wars, hybrid wars, wars involving terrorism, or conflicts involving climate change that, as we sit here, we really cannot fully understand. However, simply because those threats exist, that does not mean that nuclear blackmail does not and will not exist.

I fully accept that there are shades of grey in this debate. I absolutely reject the absolutist positions taken by some commentators, and I fully understand and respect arguments in relation to opportunity costs, but we have to make a decision now. We have been here several times before. In 2006, under the Labour party, we conducted what was appropriately called a deep dive. In 2013, very largely thanks to the Liberal Democrats—it pains me to say so, but it is nevertheless

true—we undertook an alternatives review and dealt with many of the issues involved. I have no doubt that we will discuss this afternoon the alternatives considered at that time.

In the time available, I would like to speak briefly about the two propositions of redundancy and reputation. Those are respectable arguments that deserve to be dealt with properly.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): Before my hon. Friend speaks about those two crucial points, does he agree that the speech we have just heard from the hon. Member for Chesterfield (Toby Perkins) was a most powerful argument, based on core beliefs that he has clearly thought about deeply and for a long time? It should be compelling for those of our constituents who are not clear about the party lines on this issue.

Dr Murrison: My hon. Friend is right, and the speech by the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock) was also extremely powerful.

The redundancy proposition holds that advancing technology will make the continuous at-sea nuclear deterrent redundant. It is supposed—despite all evidence to the contrary—that unmanned underwater vessels will appear and render our oceans transparent, but that is pure supposition. We cannot approach our defence on the basis of what might happen in the future. History is usually a guide in these matters, and this year we mark the centenary of the introduction of tanks into the battle space. We could have said then, “We must not develop this technology because of the possibility of sticky bombs and tank traps”, but we did not.

Mrs Moon: One lesson from history must be from Nye Bevan, who said as Foreign Secretary that he should not be sent

“naked into the conference chamber”.

What sort of emperor in new clothing would go into a conference chamber with President Putin, for example, and say, “I don't have nuclear weapons—well, I have some nuclear-powered subs, but there are no weapons on them”?

Dr Murrison: The hon. Lady is right. I am enjoying the consensual nature of this debate—it is the House of Commons at its very best. In 1929, J. F. C. Fuller said that tanks would make infantry redundant. In a sense he was right, but his timeframe was completely wrong, and the infantry was adapted rather than abolished. The imminent end of manned fighters was confidently predicted in a 1957 Government White Paper. The important point, which the hon. Lady was trying to make, is that we cannot base our defence on what we imagine might happen.

The threat of cyber and of unmanned underwater vessels should invigorate our countermeasures and our attempts to detect and potentially disrupt aggressors. Nevertheless, just as the Lightning II joint strike fighter may have only half a life before it is rendered obsolescent, we must be open to the possibility that the Successor submarine may at some point over its long life be made obsolete. However, I do not think that a sufficient argument to deploy against the decision we will make today.

The second proposition that I want to touch on is that of reputation theory. The argument is that unilateralism will in some way raise our standing internationally, but that is hopelessly naive. Try saying that to people in Ukraine; try waving the Budapest memo at them. Many will say that had Ukraine not given up its share of the USSR's nuclear armamentarium—about a third of it—when it became independent, its territory would now be assured and it would not have been invaded by Russia. I do not want to take that argument too far, because others will make counter arguments about the wisdom of Ukraine having nuclear weapons—personally, I am pleased it does not—but from the perspective of a state that is trying to face down an aggressor, that is a powerful argument.

Some say that if we cut our nuclear arsenal others will follow, but there is no evidence to suggest that that is the case. We have cut our arsenal dramatically in recent years, yet other states have increased theirs.

Finally, in this atmosphere of Brexit, when we are re-forging our links with other international organisations and operating in an outward-facing way that I find refreshing, we must think about our permanent membership of the UN Security Council. That membership is contingent on this country offering something. It may pain some right hon. and hon. Members to ponder this, but in large part our membership of that body is down to our continued possession of this terrible weapon.

6.15 pm

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): I rise to support the motion. There are those who do not agree with my position, including in my own party, and I do not disagree that they have the right to hold their position. I respect their position; I do not question their motives, and I believe that people can argue from an alternative position to mine. Unfortunately, respect is something of a rarity in our political landscape at the moment, and it saddens me to say that that includes people in my own party.

Our independent nuclear deterrent has its origins in the great radical and reforming 1945 Labour Government. Political giants of my party took the decision that the UK should develop its own nuclear weapon. They saw that as being vital for our nation's security against the rising threat from the Soviet bloc and the uncertain world they faced. That commitment to our national security, while pursuing a policy of outward-looking international engagement, has been a cornerstone of Labour's position, and it is universally shared by our supporters.

Today we face an uncertain world, and some of the threats that we face are the same as those faced by our forebears in 1945. Those threats include state-on-state conflict and a resurgent Russia that is now wedded not to communist ideology and doctrine but to a crude nationalism that has no respect for international boundaries or laws. Russia has a clear path to increasing its military spending and its nuclear arsenal, and it has a doctrine of spheres of influence reminiscent of the 1940s. We also face threats such as Islamic terrorism, global warming and economic uncertainty. Is there one silver bullet to resolve all those threats? No, there is not, but the retention of our nuclear deterrent is vital to resist the threat of a resurgent Russia that is developing its nuclear weapons.

The Leader of the Opposition has portrayed today the uncertainty about the Labour party position. In the last Parliament I was asked by the then Leader of the Opposition to conduct a review of our deterrent. We met 28 stakeholders from all sides of the debate—including my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn), who was then chair of Labour CND—and that resulted in a report of more than 35,000 words. The report built on the work of the Defence Committee, the Labour Government's 2006 White Paper and the Trident alternatives review. All the evidence that was taken came to the conclusion that replacing our Vanguard-class submarines was the only alternative. That report fed into our policy review and was adopted at our 2014 conference. That is the policy that I stood under, as did every other Labour candidate, including my right hon. Friend.

Robert Ffello (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Lab): If time permits, I hope that my hon. Friend will mention an issue that affects a lot of my constituents in North Staffordshire. A lot of our young people join the military and put their lives on the line for this country. How can we stand here in this Chamber knowing that we are putting their lives on the line, but not giving them the back-up of a nuclear deterrent?

Mr Jones: My hon. Friend is saying that the Labour tradition is to support our armed forces, and I totally agree. The manifesto that I and the Leader of the Opposition stood on was also voted on, and 9.3 million members of the electorate supported it. The argument in tonight's motion is identical to what was in that manifesto. It is ironic that we are having a free vote, since my hon. Friend the Member for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle) put that argument to the Leader of the Opposition in 2015 and it resulted in her removal from the Labour Front Bench. Unfortunately I, too, had no option but to resign.

The alternatives review by my hon. Friend the Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry) has been going on for the past seven months. Much airtime has been given to it, but not a single word has yet been published. It is a bit like the mythical unicorn—people believe it exists, but it has never actually been sighted.

The important point about our deterrent is security, but we cannot forget about the jobs it brings. I am proud to support both Unite and GMB members who work in the industry. They are professional, skilled and dedicated in their work. I challenge those who vote against the motion tonight to look those workers directly in the eye and tell them what the alternatives are for their communities—not empty promises of jobs tomorrow or in the future, but what will happen now.

My party has a proud track record in government on disarmament, to which I am committed, and I am glad the motion contains a commitment to multilateral nuclear disarmament. More important for our nation at this time, however, is that walking away from our commitments to our NATO partners would be a fundamental mistake. It would indicate that we were withdrawing from the world, and we cannot afford to do that. Voting for the motion is in the long tradition of my party, which believes in the security of our nation. My party is committed to a peaceful and outward-looking world,

[Mr Kevan Jones]

and to ensuring that what we do in this House makes a difference and improves people's lives. That cannot be done unless we have security.

6.21 pm

Johnny Mercer (Plymouth, Moor View) (Con): I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to contribute to the debate.

I represent the great city of Plymouth, where we have a long and proud naval history. Plymouth is where the Vanguard-class submarines are repaired and refitted. I will not make an overly lengthy contribution today, but I would like to give my experience of the representations made in my constituency, where the Trident programme plays such a significant role in our local economy. Representatives of Plymouth, sent here to represent our famous naval city, have always taken very seriously our twin responsibilities—to the nation's security and to the employment prospects of those who have loyally maintained, and continue to maintain, the submarines that carry Trident missiles.

The Vanguard submarines are repaired and refitted at the Devonport dockyard in Plymouth. For me and my colleagues who represent Plymouth, they are a vital source of employment for thousands, as they are for other Members with naval bases in their constituencies. That source is not as easily replaced as some might think, and my colleagues' view and mine is that it would be simply a gamble too far. We live in a desperately unstable world. Last weekend was perhaps the most unstable for years. That should not in itself be an argument for maintaining our Trident programme, but it illustrates how we simply cannot predict events beyond next week, let alone far in the future.

National security is fundamental to delivering all that we come into politics to deliver—a fairer society, social justice and opportunities for all. Without it, none of the causes that I know I share with many Opposition Members would be achievable. The Government have a responsibility to put the security of the nation and its people first and foremost. We need to maintain our ultimate deterrent, because we simply do not know what the future holds.

I am not deaf to those concerned about the costs and risks of maintaining the fleet in Plymouth. There is an active community of people who write to me often about that issue. As with any other contentious issue, I have sought to understand the arguments. I speak to those who agree with me and, more importantly, to those who disagree with me. On this issue, however, I am single-mindedly sure: we must maintain our commitment to this programme and replace the Vanguard-class submarines with the new Successor class. Strategically, we cannot and should not wear the risk that comes with abandoning our continuous at-sea deterrence, and the message that that would send to our NATO allies.

Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP): The hon. Gentleman represents Plymouth. There has been a lot of debate about relocating Trident to Plymouth. Would he support that move?

Johnny Mercer: Absolutely, I would support that move. I would love to have all the jobs that would come with that. We would be more than happy to have it and to build on our naval heritage in that way.

Dr Murrison: I assure my hon. Friend that all of us who represent constituencies in the south-west would be more than delighted if the work was transferred from Scotland to the south-west, in the event that our deterrent was to move.

Johnny Mercer: Absolutely. We are proud of our naval heritage in the south-west—we are very proud of the people we support, our servicemen and servicewomen, and we would be delighted to make their lives easier by providing the facilities the south-west affords. Locally, the deterrent means thousands of jobs in Plymouth and a continuance of the Plymouth naval tradition that makes so many of us so proud. It is part of the fabric of our city. To lose that would be disastrous for the communities I am here to represent.

Let us not abstain tonight. Let us not play to our home crowd. Let us stand up for Britain's place in the world and renew our nuclear deterrent. I say to Opposition Members—not to Scottish National party Members, because I have been struck by their rather childlike interventions about Libya and Iraq, which are totally separate issues—that I know many of my friends on the Labour Benches are of a similar mind to me on this issue. To those who are not, I say that I do not believe they love the country less in any way than those who support the motion. However, all the things we come into politics for are nothing without national security, and that must come first. To deliver the causes that I know are so dear to them and to me, we must renew our nuclear deterrent.

All steps must be taken to ensure the safety of this country's people. The highly skilled engineering jobs I have talked about cannot be risked. Now, with everything that is going on—not just last weekend, but in the past year—is not the time to lower our guard. The Prime Minister mentioned North Korea. Can we really lose our nuclear weapons at this time? In an ideal world, I agree that it would be great not to have nuclear weapons, but how do we disinvent something that has been invented? The Government must base their decisions on the reality they face; others have the luxury to do otherwise. Trident remains the ultimate deterrent against an attack by those who would harm this country and our people, as it has been for 60 years. The point was made earlier that the Trident system is never used. It is used, every single day. A nuclear deterrent does what it says. The Government's first priority is to ensure the safety and security of the nation and its people, and that is why I will support the Government's motion tonight. I will be proud to walk through the Lobby with colleagues from across the House.

6.27 pm

Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): As my right hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) said earlier, there exists in Scotland a broad consensus against Trident. Tonight, I expect 58 of Scotland's 59 Members of Parliament—98% of Scottish MPs—to vote against the motion. In doing so, we will be reflecting a consensus that exists in Scotland, where the Scottish

Government, the Scottish Parliament, the SNP, the Labour party in Scotland, the Scottish Green party, the Scottish TUC, great swathes of Scottish civil society and Scotland's faith communities are all opposed to having nuclear weapons foisted upon us. Indeed, just last week the Church of Scotland and the Roman Catholic bishops of Scotland publicly reaffirmed their opposition to the UK possessing these weapons.

James Cartledge: The SNP's policy is for Scotland to be independent. If Scotland no longer had a nuclear deterrent, what would be the SNP's strategy to defend Scotland in the event of an existential threat to the United Kingdom as a whole?

Brendan O'Hara: As an independent sovereign nation, we would act as every other independent sovereign nation in the world acts. The idea that Scotland is somehow incapable of defending itself as a part of the NATO alliance is absolutely bewildering and, if I may say so, unbelievably patronising. Despite what those on the Tory Benches like to think, Scotland has spoken and Scotland does not want these weapons of mass destruction.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): We have heard an awful lot about job losses in my hon. Friend's constituency. Is that something that concerns him?

Brendan O'Hara: Job losses are a concern wherever they occur and whoever the Member is, but I can say that the SNP has never and will never advocate the closure of Faslane. As a conventional naval base, Faslane has a bright non-nuclear future as part of an independent Scotland and I look forward to representing it as such. In the decade since the Government gave over time to debate Trident, the world has changed almost beyond recognition. The threats emerging from this rapidly changing world should force us to re-examine everything we once took for granted. We have heard often this afternoon that the world is a far more dangerous place than ever before. Just as the threats we face are far more complex and nuanced, so our response should be too, but sadly the Government have singularly failed to address that today.

Rushing to arm ourselves with even bigger submarines carrying even more devastating nuclear weapons does not reflect the reality spelled out in last year's SDSR. Just nine months ago, the SDSR laid out what the Government regarded as tier 1 threats facing the country. As defined by the Government, they were: international terrorism, cyber-attack, hybrid warfare and natural disaster. Nuclear attack by a foreign power was not regarded as a tier 1 threat, yet today we are told that we cannot sleep safely in our beds unless the green light is given to spend almost £200,000 million—as the hon. Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt) tells us—on a renewal programme.

The world, and the threats we face, are changing, and the UK faces the problem of how to deal with this new world. The choices we make now will determine what we can do in the future, so let us be absolutely clear: as much as we would like to, we cannot do everything. This is about stark choices, and those choices have got an awful lot harder for the proponents of Trident since the Brexit vote and the prospect of our leaving the EU,

especially given the recent analysis by the Institute for Fiscal Studies which states that the UK's GDP will reduce by up to 3.5%, resulting in the infamous black hole in the public finances of up to £40 billion by 2020. Surely the House has to know what that means for defence procurement before we sign a blank cheque for Trident.

Surely we are entitled to ask, before sanctioning £200,000 million for nuclear weapons, what the effect will be for our conventional forces. Will the Secretary of State tell us where the axe will fall in order that we might secure Trident? Will the Type 26 frigates be delayed yet again and their number further reduced? Is the Apache helicopter programme at risk? Will the F-35 programme be scaled back? Or will the axe once again fall on our already hard-pressed service personnel? It is not outrageous for the House, which is being asked to write a blank cheque, to ask for a full analysis of the cost of Brexit and the effect that the contraction of the UK economy will have on defence procurement.

We are being asked to buy four submarines, whose unique capability, we are told, is that they cannot be detected by hostile forces and therefore can move freely and undisturbed. That might well be the case today—I am sure they can—but can we honestly say that in 16 years, after we have spent £200,000 million, that unique capability will still exist? Every day, highly paid, highly intelligent people go to work in laboratories across Russia, China and the USA with the express intention of making the big missile submarine detectable and therefore useless. In all probability, by the time these new boats come into service, they will be obsolete and as difficult to detect as a white-hulled cruise ship is today.

There is no moral, economic or military case for possession of these weapons, and I will join my 57 colleagues from Scotland in voting against the motion. Despite Scotland's overwhelming rejection of Trident, however, sadly I expect the motion to carry and Scotland to find itself in the intolerable position of having weapons of mass destruction that we do not want foisted upon us by a Government we did not elect. It is an intolerable situation, and I question how much longer it can continue.

6.34 pm

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): It is a privilege to speak in a debate on one of the most essential issues that the House could discuss. This is not about a variation in tax policy that could be reversed or a change in social norms that will evolve with time; it is about the ultimate security of our nation in the coming century. This is not a time for games or minor interventions on questions of no relevance. It is time for a debate about the security of our state, the strategy of the UK and her place in the world.

I am proud to stand here, on the Conservative Benches, and look across at the Labour Benches and know that there are many people who value the UK—our freedom, our sovereignty, our liberty, our right to self-determination. I understand that they require an ultimate guarantee. We all know the truly horrific nature of these weapons, but it is through their horror and threat that they work. If they were not so horrific or terrible, the deterrent would not be so complete. We have seen time and again that the awfulness of weaponry demands a graduated

[Tom Tugendhat]

response. When we see the initial use of force, we see the armaments of the infantryman and the armaments of small aircraft. We have seen this in Europe in the past century—even in the years since the second world war: we have seen Kosovo, we have seen Ukraine, we have seen threats to our close allies in Estonia.

We see these things, however, because the weapons used are controllable and measurable; they are, to use that awful phrase, small arms. However, the capability and purpose of the nuclear deterrent lies in its not being so measurable or controllable. It is truly horrific; and in that, it works. It works not because of its first-strike capability—any fool can have a first-strike capability—but in the second strike. It works not as a weapon of aggression but only as a post mortem weapon. It is a weapon that assures your enemy that, no matter what they have done to you, you can still respond. It is the ultimate guarantee of our sovereignty and security.

It is astonishing that, having just had a referendum in which we discussed the sovereignty and control of our nation, some people are looking to hand it over and diminish it, even though we know what counts. I therefore welcome what the Prime Minister said today. When asked if she would consider using the weapon, she said yes. She gave the clarity that deterrence requires and showed the strength that will make her a fine Prime Minister. It is that strength and clarity, around the most horrific of all weapons systems, that will maintain our sovereignty and freedom.

I have heard people ask today about the UK's place in the world. Our place is at the top table, guaranteeing the international order and the freedoms and liberties of our friends. When I hear talk of unilateral disarmament and appeasement, I hear talk not of honour and morality but of dishonour and immorality. It is to abandon our position and our friends to say that dictators and despots should keep their weapons of destruction and nuclear power but that democrats should abandon the ability to defend themselves and their friends. That is unacceptable. The spectrum of defence, from the infantryman to the nuclear missile, is intertwined, is one, is blended. To unpick or divide is to disarm even the infantryman at the front. It is wrong, therefore, to talk of reducing spend on nuclear weapons and a lie to say that the money would be better spent on conventional weapons.

6.39 pm

Vernon Coaker (Gedling) (Lab): It is a privilege to follow the hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat). I am proud to stand here as someone who upholds a position that the Labour party has always stood for—proud to recognise our international responsibilities and proud to recognise that a strong defence is essential to our country.

There is no Member in this Chamber who does not wish to rid the world of nuclear weapons or who believes that they have a superior morality to anyone else, but people disagree about how to pursue the goal that we all share of reducing the number of nuclear weapons and, if at all possible, of having a world completely free of nuclear weapons. We can make a choice to disarm unilaterally or multilaterally, but we live in a more uncertain world.

Who would have predicted a few years ago the rise of Daesh; who would have predicted what the Russians have done in eastern Ukraine or indeed in Crimea? As far as I can see, in reading back to that time, nobody foresaw those events. Given that we are trying to predict what might happen over the next 40 or 50 years, why would any Government say that they would give up the ultimate insurance policy and security for our nation in those circumstances? I do not believe that the Government should do that. I think that the Prime Minister was right to argue as she did, and I view the motion before us today as reasonable and responsible.

John Nicolson (East Dunbartonshire) (SNP): Does not the hon. Gentleman accept that the example he cites—the rise of Daesh—shows the sheer absurdity of spending money on this? In a way, we are investing in cavalry after the onset of the machine gun.

Vernon Coaker: I am pleased that the hon. Gentleman has asked that question. Having set out the reason for the uncertainty of the future we face, I want in my remaining minutes to dispel some of the myths that are mentioned when nuclear weapons are debated. Nobody here believes that nuclear weapons will in any circumstances deter the sort of attacks—the awful attacks, as we all accept—that we have seen on the London underground or in Nice, for example. Of course not. Nuclear weapons are not meant to deal with that; we have conventional weapons, counter-terrorism specialists and so forth to deal with those terrorist outrages. Nuclear weapons are there to deal with the sort of inter-state actors we might see in Russia, China, North Korea or other rogue states that we cannot predict at the present time. That is what nuclear weapons are for—not for the situation articulated by the hon. Member for East Dunbartonshire (John Nicolson).

Brendan O'Hara: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that we do not have a bottomless pit or an inexhaustible supply of money, which means that choices have to be made? We are being asked to write a blank cheque for Trident this evening. At what point does Trident become too much for the hon. Gentleman?

Vernon Coaker: That is a legitimate point and we have to make a legitimate choice. I support the Government's choice because in an uncertain world as we look forward, it is a price worth paying for the defence and security of our nation. The hon. Gentleman and I know each other, so I know he is reading this stuff in a document that says that if we make an assumption that this will use about 6% of the defence budget between 2031 and 2060, Trident will cost £71.4 billion. If we make the assumptions made by the hon. Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt), we can get to £179 billion. If we make the assumptions that the hon. Gentleman makes, we can get to another figure. The figures are all in there, and I am saying yes, this is a cost worth paying and something worth doing because it provides security for our nation.

Let me now challenge the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O'Hara). I have been reading the Scottish National party's debate of a few years ago—in October 2012, I believe. Members of the Scottish Parliament resigned because of the ludicrous position into which the SNP had got itself. The Defence Secretary should

make more of this point. The ludicrous situation is that the SNP is not prepared to accept British nuclear weapons, but it will accept the American nuclear umbrella in NATO. That is the sort of thing we get from SNP Members and they need to answer it. It is no wonder that some MSPs resigned when they realised that that policy was totally and utterly contradictory. Let them explain that to the Scottish people—that they will withdraw Trident, but want to remain part of NATO.

Joanna Cherry: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me the opportunity to explain SNP policy. Is he not aware that the majority of NATO members do not have an independent nuclear deterrent? Is he aware of that?

Vernon Coaker: Of course I am aware of it. Is the hon. and learned Lady aware of the fact that NATO has something called the nuclear planning group, and that every single person in NATO has to be a member of that group and they have to agree to certain things, including the use of nuclear weapons in certain circumstances by the Americans? Is the hon. and learned Lady aware of that?

Joanna Cherry *rose*—

Vernon Coaker: I cannot give way any more.

Jobs are, of course, another crucial aspect. Tens of thousands of jobs across this country are dependent on the nuclear deterrent and the continuation of this programme. Although the continuation cannot be based solely on jobs, they are an important consideration—whether the jobs be in Scotland, Plymouth or indeed elsewhere.

I very much support the motion. It is consistent with the traditions of the Labour party, which has always been proud to defend our country, proud to recognise our international obligations and proud to stand up against those who have imposed tyranny on the rest of us. We must recognise the responsibilities we have as a senior member of NATO and a senior member of the Security Council of the UN. That comes with obligations and responsibilities. This Labour party—or part of it, anyway—accepts those responsibilities and will vote for the motion.

6.47 pm

Mr Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker), who has made not only a passionate speech, but an extremely well informed and able speech that puts very well the case for maintaining our independent nuclear deterrent. It is striking that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister should choose this debate as the first occasion on which to appear at the Dispatch Box as Prime Minister to reinforce her personal will and determination to stand up for this country, to stand up for global peace and security and to demonstrate her personal resolve to project the values that our country represents around the world.

It is also striking that her very first act as Prime Minister was to pay respect to Scotland and the Scottish Executive by visiting the First Minister at the end of last week. If I may, I would like to address the Scottish dimension to the debate. The SNP is clearly represented

in this House by many sincere unilateralists. No one need doubt their sincerity, but I very much doubt whether their views are as representative of Scottish opinion as they claim.

A recent poll showed a majority in Scotland in favour of maintaining the nuclear deterrent. [*Interruption.*] SNP Members shake their heads, and they are entitled to do so—I would expect them to—but I put it to them that there are many reasons why the SNP is ascendant in Scottish politics, and I do not think that their defence policy is one of them. I think they would still be doing well in Scotland if they were in favour of maintaining the Trident nuclear deterrent. I do not think that the case of Trident renewal was uppermost in voters' minds in Scotland at the time of the last general election or the Scottish election.

Brendan O'Hara *rose*—

Joanna Cherry *rose*—

Mr Jenkin: I appreciate that it was in their manifesto, but what of the bit of hypocrisy highlighted so ably by the hon. Member for Gedling? On the one hand, they reject the whole notion of nuclear defence, yet they want an independent Scotland to join NATO, which is a nuclear alliance, and benefit from the shelter that other countries are prepared to provide them with as part of the nuclear umbrella.

Brendan O'Hara: Perhaps, given his in-depth knowledge of Scottish politics, the hon. Gentleman can explain my presence in the Chamber today as the Member of Parliament for Argyll and Bute, a constituency that includes both Faslane and Coulport. Perhaps he can explain why the people of Faslane, Coulport and the rest of Argyll and Bute chose me when I stood explicitly on an anti-Trident ticket, if it is such a terrible and divisive vote-loser.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. I want to fit everyone in, and there are a great many SNP voices to be heard a little later. Long interventions mean that other Members do not have a chance to speak, and we do not want that to happen.

Mr Jenkin: I will move on to the next point, Mr Deputy Speaker.

My right hon. Friend the Defence Secretary is fond of describing Trident as an insurance policy, but I counsel him to use that phrase sparingly, because the maintenance of our nuclear deterrent is so much more than just an insurance policy. It is not a premium. That description “de-emphasises” the way in which the deterrent is continuously used, shaping our global security environment, and expressing the character of our country and our national will and resolve. It does not sufficiently emphasise its deterrent quality, which is not to deter terrorism or much lower forms of combat.

The invention of nuclear weapons has undoubtedly ended large-scale state-on-state warfare, and I would even be so bold as to suggest that were we to disinvent them, we would be inviting the resumption of such warfare. I am not sure that human nature miraculously changed after 1945, but something in the global strategic environment certainly did, and we no longer see that large-scale state-on-state warfare.

[Mr Jenkin]

Members of the Scottish National party have made much of the cost of Trident today, but let me ask them this question: how cheap would it need to be before they regarded it as good value for money? I do not think that that is an argument with which they are prepared to engage. They are against nuclear weapons whatever the cost, and they are perfectly sincere about that, so I invite them to stop bellyaching about the cost, because it is an irrelevant part of their argument.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that the use of huge figures in isolation is at best unhelpful and at worst misleading? When applied across a 35-year time horizon, such massive figures would, in fact, be dwarfed by our international aid budget.

Mr Jenkin: My hon. Friend is right. The cost of maintaining the nuclear deterrent on a year-on-year basis is much less than our aid budget. A year's cost of the Trident missile submarine system is the equivalent of one week's spending on the national health service. It is also about a quarter of our net contribution to the European Union, and I look forward to saving that cost.

At about 6% of the overall defence budget and about 2% of GDP, this weapons system represents extraordinarily good-value expenditure, given that it deters large-scale state-on-state warfare. It is a matter of great pride that our country has inherited this role, and, precisely because we do not want every NATO country or every democracy to have nuclear weapons, it is our duty as global citizens to retain the system, contributing, as we do, to the global security and safety of the world.

Joanna Cherry: Before the hon. Gentleman sits down, would he like to reconsider his comment that we were hypocrites because we did not want an independent nuclear deterrent, but did want to be in NATO? Does he realise that he was calling the majority of the United Kingdom's allies in NATO hypocrites?

Mr Jenkin: As was explained so ably by the hon. Member for Gedling, if a country is a member of NATO, it is a member of the NATO nuclear group. It is involved in the planning of deployment of nuclear weapons, regardless of whether they are its own weapons. Why would Scotland, under the Scottish National party, be so reluctant to play such a vital role in the global security of the country? I respect the fact that SNP members have personal scruples about nuclear weapons, and they are entitled to those scruples. I am merely arguing that were the Scottish people truly to vote on that issue and that issue alone, they might well find that their view was not representative of the aspiration of the true majority of Scots.

6.55 pm

Owen Thompson (Midlothian) (SNP): Some of the speeches that we have heard today have given me the feeling that the cold war is still going on, and "Come On Eileen" should be number one in the charts. At the other extreme, it has seemed that we are sitting here waiting for Mars to attack. A number of the arguments have struck me as slightly bizarre. However, this is a hugely serious issue.

We hear a great deal about the cost and the finances, but let us take a step back from that. Let us consider the worst-case scenario. Nuclear weapons have been fired in this country. There has been an attack. It has gone off. Are we really saying that our very first action would be the ultimate act of vengeance—that we would fire a nuclear weapon at those who had attacked us?

Alberto Costa: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Owen Thompson: No.

It is absolutely beyond belief that, at a time of national tragedy, the first thing that we would want to do would be to strike out.

Alberto Costa: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Owen Thompson: No. I think we have heard enough from the hon. Gentleman.

We need to think about how we actually present ourselves as a country. We cannot simply sit here saying, "Vengeance is the answer to all the problems that we face." Some call it deterrence, but to me it is vengeance. We would be carrying out a revenge attack.

Earlier today, my hon. Friend the Member for East Lothian (George Kerevan) asked the Prime Minister whether she would fire, and kill hundreds of thousands of innocent men, women and children. Let us consider that question, because it is the question that we should be considering. That is what these weapons do.

Alberto Costa *rose*—

James Cartlidge *rose*—

Owen Thompson: I will not take interventions. I am keen to make my speech as quickly as possible, because a number of other Members wish to speak.

Do we genuinely want to renew this weapon of vengeance? That is what the debate boils down to. We are talking about rogue states. We are talking about situations that we cannot yet begin to comprehend. The threats that the country currently faces are not posed by states with nuclear weapons; they are posed by terrorist attacks and cyber-attacks. Nuclear weapons are not the answer to those problems.

Let me take this opportunity to pay tribute to the many members of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and Scottish CND who have come from all over the country to lobby us. They came to Parliament last week, there were events throughout the country over the weekend, and more came here today. Some Members will know that last year I presented a ten-minute rule Bill on the nuclear convoys that regularly travel through my constituency. Sadly, the Bill ran out of parliamentary time and could not be given a Second Reading, but to me the answer seems simple. If we do not have the nuclear weapons, we do not need the nuclear convoys, and we can reduce the risk to those in our communities.

Let me end with a thought for Members to ponder. At the weekend, a friend said to me that if 50 nuclear warheads were set off—which is not impossible; we certainly have that capability—the result would be worldwide famine. That is the reality of the weapons that we are dealing with. There can be no place for them

in the world in which we live today. It is time for the country to take a lead, to make a stand, and to say, "We are taking the first step." By doing that, it could genuinely make the other countries follow its lead, and we could get rid of nuclear weapons throughout the world.

6.58 pm

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): We have been debating the issue of whether we should have an independent nuclear deterrent for 70 years. I suppose Ernest Bevin summed it up well. We have already heard the quotation about walking naked into the conference chamber, but Bevin said—only he could speak like this:

"We've got to have this thing over here, whatever it costs. We've got to have the Union Jack on top of it."

Like all of us, I have thought about this issue for many years, and, like most people, I have reluctantly concluded that we must have an independent nuclear deterrent. However, the debate is not just about whether or not we have an independent nuclear deterrent. I was campaigning with my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) 30 years ago in the Coalition for Peace through Security. The argument was about the existence of the independent nuclear deterrent, and we were supporting Michael Heseltine against unilateralists, particularly in the Labour party.

This is a serious debate in which we have to ask what sort of independent nuclear deterrent we want. I think it is our general conclusion that an independent nuclear deterrent based on submarines is the only viable form of a deterrent because it is the most undetectable given modern technology. I have no ideological qualms with either an independent nuclear deterrent or one based on submarines, but those who argue in favour of Trident have to keep making the case, because during the cold war the threat was clear and known, and an independent nuclear deterrent based on ballistic missiles designed to penetrate Moscow defences made a great deal of sense; we knew who would be striking us, and we knew who to strike back against, and this mutuality of awareness was what kept the cold war cold. Those who argue against a nuclear deterrent have to meet this fact of history: the existence of nuclear weapons kept the cold war cold.

Dr Julian Lewis: To support what my hon. Friend has just said, if there had not been many conflicts going on in other parts of the world where the nuclear balance of terror did not apply during the cold war, it would be possible to argue that nuclear deterrence had played no part, but the fact is that communist regimes—proxy clients, as it were, for the superpowers—were fighting each other all over the globe. The one area where communism and capitalism did not fight each other was in Europe, because that is where the balance of power and the balance of terror was doing its work.

Sir Edward Leigh: Of course I agree with that; I think that is a fact of history that is generally recognised. We have heard many powerful speeches—in particular those by the hon. Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) and my hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat)—making the case for the independent nuclear deterrent, but I say to my colleagues who made those powerful speeches that, fair enough, we are going to have an independent nuclear deterrent, but it is not

good enough to say that the cost is not an issue. I am looking at this purely as a longstanding member of the Public Accounts Committee, and I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Harwich and North Essex (Mr Jenkin) that a total cost of £31 billion plus a contingency of £10.6 billion plus an ongoing cost of 6% of the defence budget is a lot of money, and we must constantly probe the Government, question them and ask whether we are getting good value for money. I accept the arguments and I have read the reports, and I know all the alternatives have problems, but we simply cannot give a blank cheque to the military-industrial complex; we cannot, as good parliamentarians concerned with good value for money, stop questioning British Aerospace and other providers all over the country on whether they are providing good value for money.

The cross-party Trident commission talked about three possible threats: the re-emergence of a cold war-style scenario; an emerging new nuclear power engaging in strategic competition with the UK; or a rogue state or terrorist group engaging in an asymmetric attack against the UK. The commission found that there were questions about whether this particular system—which is what I am talking about; I am not talking about arguments in favour of an independent nuclear deterrent—would be viable against these threats, so we must require the Secretary of State and the MOD to go on answering these questions.

I am probably not making myself popular with Members on either side of the House who have very strong views, but when I came to this place one of the first ways I irritated a sitting Prime Minister—Mrs Thatcher—was to team up with David Heathcoat-Amory and question whether we needed a ballistic missile system and whether Cruise missiles would not be a viable alternative. I know that those who sit on the Defence Committee, who will know much more about defence, have dismissed this, but in recent years the American Government have converted four of their ballistic missile-carrying submarines into submarines that carry Cruise missiles.

Tom Tugendhat: My hon. Friend is making a powerful speech on the cost, and he is absolutely right of course that we must keep costs under review and make sure that BAE and others deliver on time and on budget, but on the question of Cruise missiles, is there not a danger that were we to nuclear-arm Cruise missiles, any Cruise attack would have to be seen as a nuclear attack and therefore to be responded to in kind? Is there not a danger that Cruise missiles would up the ante, rather than lower it?

Sir Edward Leigh: That is a powerful point, and I am not taking an absolutist position. I know that many Members do want to take an absolutist position on this, but I am not suggesting today that Cruise missiles are the answer, and my hon. Friend made the powerful point that the whole reason behind our independent nuclear deterrent is that it is not a system of first resort; that is what he was arguing, and he made that point again in that intervention. What I am trying to argue is that when our defence spending is so tightly constrained, whatever the arguments—and they are very powerful arguments—in favour of an independent nuclear deterrent, we have to keep questioning the Government on what was the source-argument for having a ballistic system of

[Sir Edward Leigh]

massive power designed to penetrate hugely powerful defences around Moscow, because that is not the threat we face today from either low-grade rogue states or terrorist movements.

I will be voting with the Government tonight, but I will not be handing them a blank cheque. I will be continuing to ask for value for money, and I believe every Member of the House should do the same.

7.6 pm

Mr Roger Godsiff (Birmingham, Hall Green) (Lab): May I say at the outset that I was a multilateralist during the cold war? I supported the balance of terror in Europe, I have never been a member of CND and, indeed, once the atom was split we could not unmake it. But the world has changed, and that is why I have changed my view.

May I also acknowledge the genuine and understandable concerns of my hon. Friends who represent constituencies that are intimately involved in the renewal of the Trident project? I would feel exactly the same way if I was representing their constituents, with 30,000 jobs at risk. I understand that, but the cost of this programme is admitted to be between £31 billion and who knows what, because the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister have not answered the question put by the leader of the SNP about the final costs of the programme. I do not believe that can be justified as value for money when I think a number of the arguments are flawed.

What are those arguments? Usually three are put forward. The first is that the system is independent. It is not; the UK has four nuclear submarines, each of which can carry up to eight missiles. The UK does not own the missiles; it leases them from America.

Alberto Costa: Can the hon. Gentleman please explain to the House what precise technical expertise he has to suggest these are not genuinely independent missile systems?

Mr Godsiff: The UK leases the missiles from America, where they are made, maintained and tested. Our four submarines have to go to the American naval base in Georgia to have the missiles fitted. That is a fact. It is of course said by those who support renewal that we have "operational independence". Bearing in mind that we do not own the missiles but lease them from America, I just do not believe that there is any scenario in which a British Prime Minister would authorise a submarine commander to use the nuclear weapons anywhere in the world without first notifying the Americans.

Dr Julian Lewis: I appreciate what the hon. Gentleman is saying, and he is being very reasonable in his approach. The point about the second centre of decision making, which both Republican and Democrat American Governments have supported since 1958, is about the danger that another country might think it could pick off the UK without the Americans responding on our behalf. They probably would respond but it would be too late by the time the aggressor found that out. That is why knowing that the UK can defend itself is welcomed by the Americans, so that no fatal miscalculation of that sort can be made.

Mr Godsiff: I have debated these issues with the right hon. Gentleman on a number of occasions and I respect what he says, but I just do not agree with him.

The second argument put forward is that if the UK did not have nuclear weapons, it would, somehow, lose its place on the UN Security Council. That is nonsense, because when the Security Council was formed only one of the five permanent members had nuclear weapons—America. If it is now argued that to be a member of the UN Security Council, one has to have nuclear weapons, countries such as Japan, Germany and Brazil, which have legitimate claims to become part of an enlarged Security Council, would not be allowed to join, but three countries would be able to join—North Korea, Israel, and Pakistan, because they all have nuclear weapons.

The third argument is that nuclear weapons give us protection in an ever-changing world. This country, like all other developed countries, faces threats to its security from rogue states, international terrorist groups and groups within our own society who want to destroy it. As I have said many times, these threats are best met by our membership of NATO, the most successful mutual defence pact in history. It never attacked anybody between the time it was set up in 1948 and the end of the cold war. The tragedy of NATO has been that after the cold war—after the Berlin wall came down—it changed from being a mutual defence pact and became the world's policeman, and that has caused enormous problems in its member countries. I believe that our security is best guaranteed by NATO, but I also believe that all the countries of NATO should contribute towards the cost of the nuclear umbrella; they should not get a free ride from America.

The way to deal with threats from terrorism, domestic or international, is by having a fully staffed and fully financed Security Service, by ensuring that the police have the money to do the job they need to do and by ensuring that our own conventional forces are given the tools for the job when they are sent into military conflicts on our behalf. The Chilcot report, which came out a week or so ago, graphically identified the deficiencies in materials and protections that our troops in Iraq faced. British soldiers should not go into any conflict on our behalf without the best equipment and protection we can give them.

Let me make this final point. We have witnessed terrible terrorist atrocities in the past year or so, and we witnessed the London bombings, but did our ownership of nuclear weapons prevent these things? We saw what happened in Paris and at the weekend in Nice, but did France's nuclear deterrent prevent those things from happening? I am not convinced that spending a huge sum on renewing our nuclear deterrent, which I do not believe is independent, is justified; we should support NATO, back it and contribute to it, but I am not convinced that this is value for money. That is why I will vote against the motion this evening.

7.14 pm

Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con): Margaret Thatcher and, I believe, Tony Benn used to say that there are no final victories in politics. Despite the storms of past controversies and the hard work required to win important arguments, some arguments need to be won again and

again, by each generation in turn, and so we are here again today. Some politicians talk as though a world without nuclear weapons were a possibility that could be realised, or at least seriously advanced, by our giving up our own unilaterally; as if the threat from nuclear armed states is not real, growing and still unanswered; and as if Britain should, in these times of all times—these post-Brexit times when we need our friends and allies more than ever—step back from our own defence and that of our allies. In essence, whether opponents say it or not, they suggest that we should piggy-back on our already stretched friends.

Mr MacNeil: The hon. Gentleman is a defender of the idea of a nuclear deterrent and the deterrent effect. Does he follow that logical train of thought and therefore stretch to agreeing with biological and chemical deterrents?

Robert Jenrick: Today, we are discussing the nuclear deterrent.

We have heard some curious arguments tonight. We have heard an argument that this is all about cost, but security is not about cost; security is the foundation of everything we hold dear. Without security, there is nothing. Without security, the costs are incalculable.

Nuclear deterrence has preserved the security and stability of this country for half a century. When I was a teenager, our national response to what appeared to be the end of the Soviet menace in the 1990s was to plan for a reduction in the size of our nuclear arsenal, without abandoning our commitment to an independent deterrent capability. That was then a sensible way to hedge against unpredictable future threats to this country's vital interests. It was the right approach then and it is the right approach again today.

Stephen Pound (Ealing North) (Lab): I am sure that the hon. Gentleman, like me, will have browsed through the business pages of *The Sunday Telegraph* yesterday. He will have noticed that there is some concern as to whether BAE Systems and Rolls-Royce can actually deliver the Successor programme on time and on budget. Does he think it would be wise for the Secretary of State to make contingency plans for possible failure in that direction?

Robert Jenrick: The hon. Gentleman makes a sensible point. As I understand it, the Secretary of State is committed to reporting annually on the progress of the project, and I hope that will give some comfort to the hon. Gentleman and to all of us who want to see it proceed successfully.

In the time I have available, let me summarise the arguments as I see them. First, deterrence is not simply for the cold war history books, as some have said this evening. Deterrence remains essential to prevent major wars from occurring between nation states, and to prevent our being coerced and blackmailed by threats from those who possess nuclear weapons. Deterrence also extends into war itself, ensuring—or attempting to ensure—that any war, whether large or small, is a limited war.

Secondly, we still live in a uniquely dangerous world, at risk of terrorist attack, as we heard from the Prime Minister earlier. We are also at risk and uncertain in terms of nation states and other major powers around the world, as other hon. Members have said. A couple

of days ago, I saw on television the dignified face of Marina Litvinenko, as she stood on College Green, outside this building. She is a living testament to the danger and unpredictability of the regime in Russia.

We have seen further evidence of the growing long-term instability in Asia with the escalation of the South China sea dispute. That is surely one of the disputes that will mark out our generation and beyond, and which in turn will encourage the United States to pivot its attention and resources further towards the Pacific and away from Europe's security. In late June, North Korea succeeded in launching a home-grown intermediate-range ballistic missile, which flew a distance of 250 miles to the Sea of Japan after five previous failed attempts. And let us not forget that it is little over a year since the signing of Iran's nuclear deal, which I suspect will only delay the prospect of that country's pursuit of nuclear weapons. Hon. Members might not be aware that Iran celebrated the first anniversary of the signing of that deal by firing a long-range ballistic missile using North Korean technology.

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): Surely the poisoning of Litvinenko and the annexation of Crimea happened despite our having nuclear weapons, so what exactly have they prevented?

Robert Jenrick: The point that I am making is that we cannot predict the future. We only have to look at the events of recent days and weeks to see the incredible unpredictability of this world. Most Members, myself included, could not have predicted the events of the last three weeks and we certainly cannot predict the events of the next three or four decades.

Alex Chalk: On the subject of Russia's actions, would not the annexation of territory on our continent have been unimaginable two years ago? This just goes to show that we need to be prepared for things that are completely beyond our expectations.

Robert Jenrick: My hon. Friend makes an important point. The past is a poor predictor of the future. Looking back at our own history, we can say that we are not good at predicting the future.

Thirdly, as the Prime Minister has said, we cannot outsource our security—or rather, we can, but we take a grave risk if we do so. In the early post-cold war period, the willingness of the United States to stand with its allies—

Mr MacNeil: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way in the last 10 seconds of his speech. Is he aware of the book by Peter Osborne in which the author tells of the Iranian leadership describing nuclear weapons as “haram”?

Robert Jenrick *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. It will be obvious to the House that a great many people still wish to speak and that there is not very much time left. I now have to reduce the time limit to four minutes.

7.22 pm

Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde) (SNP): When I sit in the House of Commons, I talk to many Members who support Trident. I can tell them that those weapons can kill 100 million people, but they know that. I can tell them that watersheds will be poisoned, crops will fail and many people will die from famine, pestilence and plague, but they know that. I can tell them that weapons of mass destruction have not stopped wars across the globe, but they know that. I can tell them that WMD are no protection from terrorism or cybercrime, but they know that. I can tell them that the £179 billion could be spent on health, education, housing, transport and social welfare, but they know that. The difference between us is that they believe that WMD are a deterrent and that their existence has kept us safe. Let us look at those claims.

In the lead-up to today's debate, the Henry Jackson Society was kind enough to send me a copy of its report, "Foreign Nuclear Developments: A Gathering Storm". A better title would be "Be afraid: be very afraid". The report makes it clear that it would be foolhardy of the UK to give up its nuclear weapons because North Korea, Russia, China and Iran either have nuclear weapons or are actively pursuing them.

Alberto Costa: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Ronnie Cowan: No.

It is a well-rehearsed argument on deterrence that to prevent other nations from striking us, we must have the ability to strike them. It is of course a flawed theory. I will, however, give the Henry Jackson Society credit for its bravery in issuing a report outlining bold theories about the imminent nuclear threat of other nations just a week after this House was asked to consider the findings of the Chilcot report. Chilcot reminds us that we should be cautious of second-guessing the military intentions of other countries.

In voting on the renewal of the Trident nuclear weapons system, we need to ask ourselves: who are these weapons deterring? Can those in favour of Trident genuinely foresee a situation in which China or Russia would commit such an act of economic suicide as a nuclear strike against a western power? The primary factor in establishing peace in an increasingly globalised world is the linked economic interests of nations, not the imminent threat of nuclear attack. To say the world is safer because of nuclear weapons is akin to saying that there would be less gun crime in the United States if there were more firearms.

General George Lee Butler, a former Commander in Chief of the US Strategic Command who was once in charge of all US strategic nuclear weapons, has said:

"Nuclear deterrence was and remains a slippery intellectual construct that translates very poorly into the real world of spontaneous crises, inexplicable motivations, incomplete intelligence and fragile human relationships."

Nuclear deterrence requires an assumption that the Governments of our enemies will always act rationally. What deterrence are nuclear weapons to Governments or organisations that hold extreme or fundamentalist religious views and have no fear of death? What deterrence are nuclear weapons to a dictatorship on the brink of collapse that has nothing left to lose? The reality is that

we cannot guarantee that such Governments will always act rationally. Trident therefore offers us no protection. So if it is not a deterrent, is it therefore nuclear revenge?

Alberto Costa: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Ronnie Cowan: No.

We are locked in our cold war mentality of maintaining weapons to counter threats that do not exist, telling ourselves that an imminent threat could emerge at any time. Spending billions on Trident renewal is paying a ransom to past fears when we should be investing in a hopeful future. The generations to come shall reap what we sow. I fear that if we continue down this road we may never be able to find our way back to a safe haven.

7.26 pm

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Inverclyde (Ronnie Cowan), even though I disagree with the points that he made.

This is an interesting debate for me, because when I was growing up my father worked in the Devonport dockyard on the refits of the Vanguard-class submarines. I remember the campaign back in the early 1990s to get that refit work done in Plymouth rather than having it end up in Rosyth, and we can still see the hole that exists there.

Mr MacNeil: Given that we have heard in the past that it was too dangerous to put the nukes in Devonport, as a keenster on the nukes, would the hon. Gentleman have nuclear weapons based in Devonport?

Kevin Foster: Before the proposal for independence was rejected in the referendum, there was a debate about whether we would have the nuclear weapons in the south-west, and I think most people said, "Yes, of course we will." Other MPs representing the south-west have spoken in the debate, and we would certainly welcome the jobs and investment involved.

Let us be clear about the choice before the House today. It is whether to have a deterrent. I have listened to some of the alternatives that have been put forward today, and I think the hon. Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr Godsiff) would find it useful to visit Coulport and see what is actually there. That might help his knowledge. It has been suggested that we might put something on an Astute-class submarine. I think it is safe to say that no nation, seeing a cruise missile coming towards it, is going to wait until the thing detonates to find out whether it is a conventional missile or a nuclear missile. That proposal would also involve far more risk to the submariners, because they would have to get much closer to the country that we were deterring. The operations would also have to become more sneaky. People might think that a submarine might want to act sneakily in order to remain hidden, but that is not the case. The idea behind a ballistic missile capability is that it assures people that we can provide a credible deterrent and a credible response to a nuclear attack, either on ourselves or on our allies, but also that it provides other nations with an assurance that we are not planning a sneaky first strike. If we had the kind of technology that some have suggested, it would simply undermine the situation and provoke worry and fear in others.

It is also worth looking at what we have done to reduce our own nuclear weapons. The RAF no longer has strategic bombers, and we have also removed the weapons from Royal Navy shipping. I think that we are the only one of the declared nuclear powers that has nuclear weapons on one platform only. That is the real way to reduce the nuclear threat, not through some gesture towards disarmament.

Is the nuclear deterrent still needed? To answer that question, we need to look at the alternatives. One of the alternatives put forward is to rely on article V of the north Atlantic treaty—that is what the SNP proposes. NATO is not just a conventional alliance but a nuclear one, yet the SNP would wish to join it. I find it interesting that the SNP wants a nuclear-weapons-free Scotland, yet when I enjoyed all 670 pages of “Scotland’s Future”—the White Paper for independence—I found that it contained the classic comment that the SNP would still allow NATO vessels to visit without confirming or denying whether they carried nuclear weapons. In effect, the SNP’s own version of “don’t ask, don’t tell.” A big ballistic submarine could still pull up, but that would be all right, because the SNP would not have asked the question.

Ian Blackford: What the SNP wants is to be a member of NATO and for NATO to be nuclear-free. That would be the best solution. There is a choice between investing in Trident and extra investment in conventional arms, because the reality is that no conventional surface warships are based in Scotland. We heard about the Falklands earlier, but there are no warships in the Falklands. We are not taking up the responsibilities that we should be. Should we not fix that rather than waste £200 billion on weapons of mass destruction?

Kevin Foster: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention, because it gives me the opportunity to expose some of the holes in his defence knowledge. The Royal Navy regularly bases a capital ship around the Falklands when the needs demand it, and there is also an offshore patrol vessel down there.

We have heard in today’s debate that nuclear weapons do not deter Daesh, but a battle tank will not deal with a cyber threat and an infantryman will not shoot down a high-altitude jet aircraft. The reality is that we need to consider the spread of current threats and possible future threats and then look at what we put into them. Could we, as a NATO member, realistically face nuclear blackmail? Yes we could. Vladimir Putin is not revamping Russia’s nuclear capability because he wants it to appear at an air show.

Alberto Costa: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Kevin Foster: I apologise to my hon. Friend, but I will press on, given the time.

Although NATO depends on mutual defence, how confident are we that future United States Governments will want to continue to accept 70% of NATO’s bill? How many people are confident that Donald Trump—once an ambassador for business in Scotland—would put the defence of Europe at the top of his list? If he did not, the deterrence against aggression from the east against our eastern allies would ultimately be determined by Britain and France possessing an effective nuclear deterrent.

There are arguments about biological and chemical weapons, but the reality is that if an attack with such weapons was launched against this country by an aggressor state, one part of our potential response would be the consideration of a nuclear response, so that argument does not defeat the need for a deterrent.

Finally, on the argument that international law could get rid of all nuclear weapons, sadly I think that some of the rogue states that are likely to be a threat would just file it along with all the other bits of international law that they are breaking. This debate is about the UK’s ultimate insurance policy and ensuring that we can meet the threats of the future, so there is only one vote that Members can sensibly make this evening, and that vote is Aye.

7.33 pm

Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab): One of the great traditions of this House is that on matters of conscience, such as that before us today, Members draw on a wide range of different experiences and viewpoints in coming to their conclusions.

The argument has been made that not replacing our nuclear weapons would diminish our international standing and be an abdication of our role as a permanent member of the UN Security Council. We have heard that Trident is a necessary deterrent—the ultimate insurance policy for our nation. People have written to me about the jobs that rely on Trident.

Stephen Pound: My right hon. Friend and I both believe in a tradition of beating swords into ploughshares and spears into pruning hooks. Does he agree that programmes such as KONVER, for the peaceful transition of skilled technicians into peaceful programmes, represent a far better recipe for peace in the world than a never-ending arms race?

Mr Lammy: I commend that Swedish programme. Like my hon. Friend, I stand here first and foremost as a Christian, and I speak from that perspective. I stand here united with Pope Benedict XVI, who has said:

“In a nuclear war there would be no victors, only victims.”

I stand here alongside all the world’s faiths. In the words of the UK multi-faith statement on nuclear weapons:

“Any use of nuclear weapons would have devastating humanitarian consequences...and violate the principle of dignity for every human being that is common to each of our faith traditions.”

The idea of loving thy neighbour and protecting our world for future generations simply cannot hold if we have stockpiles of weapons that can destroy our neighbours and our world. Not only do nuclear weapons contradict religious principles, but any form of international relations based on the threat of mutual destruction is totally contradictory to the preamble and article 1 of the United Nations charter, which talks of a system of peaceful resolution of disputes.

It is against that backdrop that I recall that I joined the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and the Anti-Apartheid Movement before I became a member of the Labour party. I remember growing up in the 1980s hugely disturbed by the idea of nuclear annihilation, which was played out all the time in films such as “Threads”. The cold war has of course dissipated somewhat, but each of the 40 warheads carried by a Trident

[Mr Lammy]

submarine is exponentially more powerful than the atomic bombs that were dropped on Japan in 1945, killing and maiming hundreds of thousands of people and casting a long and dark shadow over our history.

It is right to remind the House of the huge cost of the Trident programme, and to mention my constituents. My constituency has seen two riots in a generation; residential care homes, drop-in centres and youth centres have closed; unemployment is double the national average; and life expectancy is five years below the national average. Haringey is home to 12 of the most deprived wards in the country, and 47% of children in a ward on the doorstep of Spurs live in poverty. Against that backdrop, I cannot with good conscience vote for what is effectively a blank cheque for nuclear weapons.

I am not in the same place that I was as an 18, 19, or 20-year-old. It is possible to come to a multilateralist view and still have concerns about scale and cost. We should ask some pretty hard questions about why we do not share a nuclear capacity with our neighbours in NATO and why we need to have an independent programme at such a huge cost. Given our commitment to nuclear non-proliferation, why do we hear so little about it? Thatcher and Reagan used to talk about it regularly in the 1980s, but why do we vote against non-proliferation at the UN?

People such as Field Marshal Lord Bramall, General Lord Ramsbotham and General Sir Hugh Beach have said:

“Nuclear weapons have shown themselves to be completely useless as a deterrent to the threats and scale of the violence we currently face, or are likely to face—particularly international terrorism.”

Those men are not pacifists or unilateralists, they are simply responding to a changing international context. It is with that in mind that I will vote against the Government tonight.

7.38 pm

Ben Howlett (Bath) (Con): I have ended up following the right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) on several occasions, but I will not break the mould by agreeing with him tonight and will be voting with the Government after listening to some of the most powerful speeches that I have heard in this place for a long time. The hon. Members for Gedling (Vernon Coaker), for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock) and for Chesterfield (Toby Perkins) made passionate cases and, as someone who listens to debates, I can say that their cases have been heard clearly tonight.

Today's vote is one of the biggest tests for Britain and her place in the world. Given the events of the last few weeks, if we get this wrong, Britain's place at the heart of an internationalist world could be put at risk. No one can predict the future of our international relations over the coming decades, and the challenges that we face as a nation are tremendous. We face exciting but uncertain times ahead as we carve out Britain's new position in the world. For me, in the interests of national security, to maintain Britain's seat at the top table and for the defence of the United Kingdom, it is crucial that strong armed forces are accompanied by a strong nuclear deterrent. I therefore wholeheartedly back the renewal of Trident.

I want to take a moment to thank all our servicemen and women who devote their lives to the security of our nation. We need to do all that we can to ensure that their lives are not put in danger. A strong nuclear deterrent works as a means of promoting peace, co-operation and discourse in a very uncertain world.

I want to look back to the cold war and the effect the presence of nuclear deterrents had on its progress. During the period, there were very many small deadly conflicts where there were no nuclear weapons present, yet the big superpowers were encouraged to avoid hot war at all costs for fear of those deadly weapons being activated. I am not saying that the presence of nuclear weapons will ensure our safety on their own, but if they can have even a small deterrent effect on saving the lives of troops and protecting the United Kingdom, they are a sensible thing to have.

It is important in debates such as this that we remain realistic about future developments on the international stage. If we look at some of the world's key aggressors such as North Korea, we will see that they are advancing towards the creation of a nuclear warhead. If we were to have no nuclear arsenal or one that was not world leading, we may not face a problem in the here and now, but a few decades on, we may come to a situation in which states may be more inclined to attack the UK, knowing that we cannot answer in the same way.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): Does the hon. Gentleman have any concern for Scotland and does he know how many nuclear warheads may be pointed at Scotland by the very fact that we have the deterrent based on our soil?

Ben Howlett: I am concerned about not just Scotland, but the rest of the world. Britain's position in campaigning across the world for a reduction in the number of nuclear weapons should not distract us from what we are debating here today. Given the uncertainties in the world, I believe that we must be pursuing an international approach and an international deterrent via NATO.

I understand that there are Members in this House as well as people across the country who advocate a very different position and are calling for the removal of Trident. However, BAE Systems, Babcock International and Rolls-Royce, all specialists in this area, have made it very clear that the renewal of Trident does not mean that we are moving away from the long-term goal of nuclear non-proliferation, but are instead enhancing it and, at the same time, improving the chances of peace around the whole world.

Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP)
rose—

Ben Howlett: Sorry, I have little time left.

Our approach to nuclear weapons has been measured and proportionate so far, and I welcome that approach and want to see it continue. The UK has set an example of how to implement a minimum strategic deterrent by reducing our warhead total from 200 to 160 in recent years. We should not deviate from that approach as Britain looks to reassert its soft power internationally.

Although the strongest arguments for the renewal of Trident have to be the defence of our nation and our people, there are other arguments that also strengthen

that case, and I wish to finish my remarks by touching on the economic arguments. At a micro level, Trident renewal will have a positive impact on the British economy. Maintaining and sustaining this defence capability supports more than 30,000 jobs and around 2,200 people are already working on the Successor programme. Not only will the renewal of Trident create many more specialist and non-specialist jobs, it is estimated that more than 800 British companies will contribute to the programme and therefore feel the positive effect through jobs and growth. Given the current economic climate, we must focus our attention on that economic argument.

Let us be clear, if we fail to renew Trident, we will be doing more harm than good. If we leave the door open for nuclear blackmail, it would increase the possibility of unnecessary conventional warfare, and decrease our standing in the world. I therefore urge the House, for the benefits of national security, long term peace, and for confidence in the British economy, to support the renewal of Trident.

7.43 pm

Douglas Chapman (Dunfermline and West Fife) (SNP): It is a sad irony that a week after the long-awaited Chilcot report highlighted the worrying extent of group-think in Whitehall and Westminster, a large number of MPs will be traipsing through the Lobby in support of the principle of renewing a deterrent that represents a 20th century solution to the 21st century defence and security problems that we all experience today. Those MPs could include those who believed the UK Government's claptrap on Iraq. Perhaps nothing has been learned from Chilcot, and those MPs will be doing exactly the same on Trident.

The Defence Committee has recently completed an inquiry into the implications of an increased Russian assertiveness for UK security. In evidence session after evidence session, I struggled to find any real evidence of why I should support the renewal of Trident at a cost of up to £205 billion. In fact, as witness after witness listed the very real 21st century threats faced by the UK and our NATO and EU allies, most, if not all, could be filed under the heading of hybrid warfare, or terrorism.

Closer to home, we see an increase in Russian naval and air activities in our own territory, and the pattern is very similar to that experienced in Ukraine. There is no outright aggression, but a determination to poke, prod, check and test reaction times, which, from the UK perspective, have often been laughably slow. For example, the last time the Russian carrier, Admiral Kuznetsov, took shelter in Scottish waters, it took 24 hours for a frigate to arrive from Portsmouth to escort it from the Moray Firth.

Alberto Costa: Had the Scottish National party won the independence argument, what Army or Navy would it have to protect Scottish waters from such infringement?

Douglas Chapman: One must realise that, as an independent nation, we could provide the same support to NATO as every other single small European country, such as Denmark, Sweden and so on. It is a shameful neglect of security around Scotland that we have not one single surface vessel to protect our shoreline, and it simply points out that the age of deterrence can be viewed in so many different ways.

Dr Philippa Whitford: Was it not the case in that last entry into our waters that the Ministry of Defence heard about it only through Twitter?

Douglas Chapman: That could certainly be the case. I am sure that my hon. Friend is better informed on that point than some members of the Ministry of Defence.

Recently, the Committee visited NATO and discussed the needs of Scotland and the UK. What we heard a lot about from NATO was how we improve and increase our conventional forces, particularly those who could respond to hybrid threats. Indeed, the most prominent commitment that emerged from the Warsaw summit just last week was for a multinational brigade to be placed in the Baltic States and in Poland, which we wholeheartedly supported. What also emerged was this principle of a modern deterrence, which Trident resolutely is not.

The UK focus should be on what we can deliver for our NATO allies, instead of desperately clutching to this vestige of a long-gone superpower status—please, wake up and smell the polonium. We need to do that very quickly. Our NATO allies would rather be focused on the most basic of tasks, protecting our UK territory and that of our neighbourhood. When that Russian carrier was carrying out its activities in the Moray Firth, there were no major surface ships based in Scotland—indeed there was none north of the channel. Trident endangered us by fooling us into thinking that nuclear deterrence is the only sort of deterrence that we need.

The Royal Navy is now reduced to only 17 usable frigates and destroyers. To put that into context, the force that retook the Falklands in 1982 had more than 40 ships. The Falklands is currently without major warship protection for the first time since that conflict and UK anti-piracy and people smuggling operations in the Mediterranean and Caribbean are frequently undertaken by vessels that are simply not fit for task. To put it simply, Trident is eating into our conventional budget, which leads me to the very nub of the argument—every penny spent on Trident means a penny less spent on conventional defence. It is hardly any surprise that Admiral Lord West recently told the Defence Committee that the Navy had effectively run out of money in support of the new Type 26 programme. Therefore, while the entire Successor programme has funds ring-fenced with added generous contingencies, projects such as the Type 26s, due to be built on the Clyde, face delay after delay with a knock-on effect on construction, affecting jobs, skills and the workforce and our capability to defend ourselves.

Finally, this vote tonight puts hundreds of years of shipbuilding on the Clyde at risk because the MOD has skewed every military budget it has to spend, and it is spending that on Trident. More morally repugnant weapons of mass destruction can no longer be tolerated—indeed we must look at using other methods of modern deterrence—and to quote the Prime Minister, they are a “reckless” gamble that the country can ill afford.

7.49 pm

James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con): It is an honour to be called in a debate of such national importance. For me, there is one compelling image that encapsulates

[James Cartlidge]

why I will be voting with the Government, and I am sure many other Members have witnessed it. It is those unforgettable, harrowing glass cabinets on display in the Auschwitz museum—the piles of human hair, the mountains of shoes from the victims of the Nazis, which are a permanent, timeless reminder to all of us what happens when peoples and nations are tyrannised and brutalised in existential war.

For me, regardless of all the other arguments, that is overwhelmingly and singularly the key argument. I never, ever want to see my country again in the position that it was in in the 1940s, when we were faced with an existential threat. We were on the verge of being invaded and if that had been successful, we too would have had concentration camps in this country, and all the brutality that would have followed from that.

There may be those who say that such a war is incredibly unlikely. I say to them that there is only one guarantee against it, and that is the nuclear deterrent, however unpalatable that may be. In 1918, people would not have believed that there would be another world war, and surely not another world war even more brutal than the one that they had just experienced, but none of us can predict the future.

Dr Philippa Whitford: Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that we would have nuked Germany?

James Cartlidge: If we had the ability. The nuclear weapon is there for one thing only: to defend this country in the case of existential invasion. It is nothing to do with the terrorist threat or wars such as we had in Iraq. It is that one overriding thing. It is a guarantee of our absolute freedom and existence.

People talk about cost. We cannot have limitless cost. We must have discipline. There can be no blank cheque, but let us talk about some figures that we know definitively. In the first world war 10 million lives were lost. In the second world war 73 million lives were lost, mainly civilians. How many since then? Not a single one in a world war. That has not been a coincidence. Nuclear weapons are horrific, but they have kept the peace.

Dr Julian Lewis: To take my hon. Friend back to the earlier intervention, it is a fact that both Germany and the allies were racing to invent the atomic bomb. There is no doubt that if the Germans had got the atomic bomb first, they would have used it against us, and if we had got the atomic bomb, we would have used it against them, just as the allies did against Japan to bring the war to an end.

James Cartlidge: My right hon. Friend is right. I do not want to go back over the historic debate but there are those who argue that if the Americans had not used those atomic bombs, the death count of US troops having to invade the Japanese mainland would have been astronomical. No one wants ever to have to use that weapon. It is an horrific thing.

I conclude with what, to me, is the fundamental point. Nuclear weapons are the single most horrible thing ever invented by man, but they have given us the most beautiful thing and we should never take it for granted. They have given peace in our time to every

generation represented in this House, and we should not take that for granted. Instead of voting for complacency and relying on others to defend us, we must vote to stand firm and to deliver and guarantee that peace for many more generations to come.

7.53 pm

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friends the Members for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock) and for Chesterfield (Toby Perkins) referred to their mothers, who were at Greenham common. So was I. I did not meet their mothers, or at least not as far as I am aware, but there were tens of thousands of us who protested against nuclear weapons and the decision on the Cruise missiles, the Pershings and the SS20s. CND had hundreds of thousands on demonstrations. At that time many people believed that we faced the possible advent of a nuclear war. There was real fear in society.

The leader of the Labour party, Michael Foot, has been compared in some debates with our current leader. I worked for and with Michael Foot. He was a great patriotic anti-Fascist. He stood up to the generals—the junta that took over the Falkland Islands—and he spoke in this House on a Saturday morning and made the case for why we had to liberate the Falklands from Fascism. I believe that Michael Foot tried his very best to unite the Labour party, even though he had divisions in his shadow Cabinet. He would not have taken the position that is being taken today by the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn).

Michael Foot strove for international agreement and he worked for disarmament, but I and many others who were parliamentary candidates in 1983 know that we went into that election with what became known as “the longest suicide note in history”. In Ilford North where I was the candidate, the Labour vote almost halved and I only just kept second place from going to the new Social Democratic party. The Conservatives were rampant.

Afterwards, I was working in the party's headquarters on the defence policy. We tried to square the circle by producing a policy document called “Defence and Security for Britain”. It had a Union Jack on the cover. We emphasised strong conventional defence. We called for a defence diversification agency, and we thought that that would be sufficient under Neil Kinnock, our leader, to do much better in 1987. We did do better, but defence policy was still a factor in our losing in 1987. So we had a policy review, which included visiting Moscow, which we did in 1989. Gorbachev was talking about a nuclear-free world by 2000. In that context the Labour party shifted its policy towards one of independent steps, but within a global multilateral framework.

That policy was denounced by the historian E. P. Thompson. I do not have time today to elaborate on this, but I will write about it. In 1989 he denounced the Labour party for going back on its unilateralist position. I wrote in the CND magazine, “What is this unilateralism? Is it a tactic to get something better or is it a quasi-religious totem for left-wing atheists?” I stand by that description of some of the views that we hear today. It has become a quasi-religious totem, rather than a practical means to take measures that bring about real and profound international change. That is why I will be voting for the Government's motion this evening.

7.57 pm

Ruth Smeeth (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): I am a proud member of both the GMB and Unite trade unions and I stand here today to make the case for our national security, both in terms of the role of the deterrent in an increasingly turbulent world, and for our domestic defence manufacturing capability.

Our country is at a crossroads. Just weeks ago we voted to leave the European Union and to forge our own destiny, but we must do this as part of the family of nations and the global community, embracing our responsibilities as a permanent member of the UN Security Council and as a founder member of the NATO alliance, not running away from them. To be clear, I view the renewal of our continuous at-sea deterrent as a necessary evil. I, like all of us in the Chamber, would like to see a nuclear-free world, but this can be achieved only by international co-operation and be negotiated only from a position of strength.

To disarm ourselves unilaterally would not just be to abandon our responsibilities to our international allies, but would leave us at the mercy of other nuclear powers and would send us, in the words of Nye Bevan, so ably quoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Mrs Moon),

“naked into the conference-chamber”.

At a time of unprecedented global turmoil, it would be utter recklessness to abandon a fundamental element of our national security in the name of some abstract ideological objection, however well meaning.

Mrs Moon: Should we not get this into some sort of perspective? By 2020 the UK's stockpile of nuclear weapons will be no more than 180, with only 120 operationally available, whereas Russia, China and North Korea have between 6,500 and 8,500 between them.

Ruth Smeeth: My hon. Friend ably outlines the threat we really face.

The horrific attacks in Nice last week were just the latest reminder of the risks we face. We are living through a period of extraordinary global turmoil, with threats coming from not just international terrorist networks but a resurgence in tensions between state actors—not least Russia, as the Defence Committee outlined only this month. Not only should Russian actions in Crimea, Ukraine and the Arctic give us pause for thought, but the Russian nuclear doctrine has also changed radically, and for the worse, since the end of the cold war. Not since the fall of the Berlin wall has our deterrent been so critical to our national security. Russia, with its use of increasingly hostile rhetoric, is lowering its nuclear threshold. This is, therefore, no time for Britain to abandon our nuclear capabilities or our commitments to our friends and allies.

Our military is rightly widely admired as the best in the world, and we in this place owe it to the members of our military to ensure that they are provided with the resources and support they need to ensure that our country is prepared for any scenario. However, we must also look closer to home—to the security of our communities and our economy. On that basis, the argument for our deterrent is unquestionable. Tens of thousands of jobs depend on our commitment to the Successor programme.

Angela Crawley: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ruth Smeeth: I am not giving way.

Whole communities live their lives in the shadow of the shipyards and the darker shadow that falls alongside them—the uncertainty over their future and their livelihoods. These are skilled men and women, working good jobs to support their families, including in my city of Stoke-on-Trent, where one local company in Burslem contributes to the supply chain of the Successor programme. These communities need our support and our commitment to their industry, and today we have the opportunity to offer them the reassurance they need.

As a country, we need to protect our manufacturing capability and to ensure long-term investment in our national industry. As has been repeatedly stated in the debate—most powerfully by my hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock)—the renewal of our deterrent is my party's policy and my union's. For those who understand the proud history of our movement, that should come as no surprise. From Major Attlee's support for Churchill in our country's darkest hour to the founding of NATO under Ernest Bevin, our party has always stood up first and foremost for the security of our nation—we do now, and we always will.

As Tim Roache, the general secretary of my union, the GMB, has said:

“We've had enough of politicians on all sides playing politics with tens of thousands of highly skilled jobs and the communities they support.”

For the sake of those communities, for the sake of our economy and for the long-term security of our country, I will be voting in favour of replacing the current Vanguard submarines with the new Successor class, and I urge others to do the same.

8.3 pm

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): Today's vote and our decision about Trident are at the heart of what kind of future we want for ourselves and our children. However, it is also about the hard evidence and what we mean by safety in an uncertain and changing world.

The theory that having nuclear weapons makes us safer is entirely unproven, and nor can it be proven. As David Krieger from Waging Peace writes:

“In logic, one cannot prove a negative, that is, that doing something causes something else not to happen. That a nuclear attack has not happened may be a result of any number of other factors, or simply of exceptional good fortune.”

Indeed, many military experts argue that, in fact, nuclear weapons make us less safe, primarily because their very existence increases the likelihood that they will be used and contributes to the amount of nuclear material circulating around the world.

Back in 2014, senior military, political and diplomatic figures, including former Conservative Foreign Secretary Sir Malcolm Rifkind, former Defence Secretary Des Browne and former Foreign Secretary Lord Owen, came together with the explicit aim of

“shining a light on the risks posed by nuclear weapons.”

They said:

“We believe the risks posed by nuclear weapons and the international dynamics that could lead to nuclear weapons being used are underestimated or insufficiently understood by world leaders.”

[Caroline Lucas]

The Government's main argument for replacing Trident appears to be that it is the ultimate insurance in an uncertain world, but what they fail to acknowledge is that our possession of nuclear weapons in contravention of the non-proliferation treaty is exacerbating that uncertainty—it is leading to the very scenario that it is designed to avoid.

Nor have the advocates of nuclear weapons ever explained why, if Trident is so vital to protecting us, that is not also the case for every other country in the world. How can we possibly try to deny other countries the right to acquire nuclear weapons if we are upgrading our own nuclear weapons? Do proponents of Trident renewal genuinely believe that a world where all countries have nuclear weapons would be safer than the one we live in today?

Such immunity to reason means that there is a blinkered approach to the heightened risk of accidents or threats to UK nuclear weapons, whether that is in Scotland, at the Faslane and Coulport bases, or in England, at AWE Aldermaston and Burghfield, or whether it is in relation to the nuclear warhead convoys taken out on our public roads, such as the M4 and the M25—indeed, some were seen on the M74 just a few weeks ago—and which go through small villages, sometimes up to a dozen times a year.

There is also little recognition of the fact that nuclear weapons systems are themselves fallible. According to a quite shocking report by Chatham House, there have been 13 incidents since 1962 in which nuclear weapons have nearly been launched. One of the most dramatic, in 1983, was when Stanislav Petrov—the duty officer in a Soviet nuclear war early-warning centre—found his system warning of the launch of five US missiles. After a few moments of agonising, he judged it—correctly—to be a false alarm. However, if he had reached a different conclusion and passed the information up the control chain, it could have triggered the firing of nuclear missiles by Russia.

People say that we cannot uninvent things that have been invented, but biological weapons were banned in 1972, chemical weapons in 1993, landmines in 1997 and cluster munitions in 2008. If the political will is there, it can be done.

Dr Julian Lewis: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Caroline Lucas: No.

Right now, around 130 countries have endorsed a UN motion calling for a global ban treaty on nuclear weapons. Negotiations for that global ban treaty may begin next year, but this Government are holding out and refusing to engage with multilateral UN processes to secure a nuclear-free world. The Government therefore have no credibility when they say they are seriously working for a nuclear-free world. In an increasingly interconnected world, where our security is deeply linked to the security of those around us, and where we need to be gradually doing the slow and hard work of disarming, the Government's response is the wrong one, and it takes us backwards. By voting to renew Trident, we are sending a signal that power by any means is necessary—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order.

8.7 pm

Steven Paterson (Stirling) (SNP): Last year, the Government produced their strategic defence and security review and the accompanying national security strategy, identifying the threats to the security of the United Kingdom and weighing them according to the perceived likelihood and level of threat. The documents also attempted to offer a response to those perceived threats in terms of the shape and strength of our armed forces in future years. However, the Government are disregarding the findings of their own SDSR in terms of the threats posed, by positing the UK's entire defensive structure on the retention of the continuous at-sea nuclear weapons deterrent.

The affordability of the programme is a major issue because the costs of the entire Trident programme must be met from a finite military budget and at the expense of conventional forces and resources to combat new threats, such as cyber.

Angela Crawley: Does my hon. Friend agree that, ultimately, the Government should prioritise their spending on intelligence and national security to combat terrorism and cyber-security issues, rather than on nuclear weapons that can never be used?

Steven Paterson: I do accept that, but it is fair to say that, in the SDSR, the Government did make significant moves forward and invested correctly in intelligence and cyber. However, it is also true that we face a choice between investing in nuclear weapons and in conventional weapons and all those other responses: we cannot spend the money twice.

The Government have identified that £31 billion is necessary for the construction of the four replacement submarines, with a £10 billion contingency fund for unanticipated costs. However, the true costs of this programme in its entirety, including maintenance, the missiles and the nuclear warheads, will undoubtedly be far higher. As we heard earlier from the Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee, it could be £179 billion over the lifetime of the programme. We have form here. In the 2010 SDSR, the cost of replacing the submarines came in at £20 billion, but it is now £31 billion, with a £10 billion contingency for when it overruns, which is likely, given what happened with the Astute submarines—they overran.

I remind those saying we can have a nuclear deterrent and a capable military force that the 2010 SDSR is responsible for the Royal Navy going from 23 surface vessels to 19, with 40,000 personnel lost from the UK regular forces. Only last week, the House debated some of the appalling failures in appropriately arming and equipping our armed forces for deployment in Iraq, with Chilcot identifying a refusal to allocate a sufficient budget as a direct and damning failure. I ask colleagues to consider that before voting tonight, because this will be a vast and recurring spend over a number of decades. The Defence Secretary has said that his estimate of the cost of operating the continuous at-sea deterrent is about 6% of the defence budget, or about £2 billion to £2.3 billion per year. However, the fall in the value of sterling since Brexit could have a severe impact. One would imagine that the costs could go up, and our experience so far with other programmes is that that is what happens.

I turn to one of the central assumptions in the argument of those who support the renewal of the Trident nuclear weapons system for a period stretching to the 2060s—the assumed inability of an enemy to detect the single nuclear weapon-armed submarine on patrol at any given time. It is over 40 years until the 2060s—the projected end of the Successor submarines' operational lives. Given the technological advances of the past 40 years—the internet, mobile phones, and satellite technology—are we seriously saying that we can predict accurately where technology will have taken us 40 years hence? This is a decision to commit a gigantic sum of money, over subsequent decades, to the continuation of the Trident programme, yet we must assume that there will be no technological advance that will allow for the detection of these vessels beneath the ocean surface. That is not tenable. Were such a technological advance to occur, even the most ardent advocate of the continuous at-sea deterrent would have to concede that it would mean the loss of the system's most important advantage. In such a circumstance, the continuous at-sea deterrent would be rendered vulnerable, if not altogether obsolete. Sea drones are one such technology currently being considered that may have the potential to be propagated in coming decades. The Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee suggested that that might happen. Such a development would, at least, require considerable investment in counter-measures, putting more pressure on future defence budgets.

Finally, I want to mention the elephant in the room—possible Scottish independence. I have no intention of getting into why this would be a very good idea for Scotland, although it would, but it has a direct and profound bearing on our debate, and it has not come up much tonight. Whether or not hon. Members agree that Scottish independence is preferable, it is at least a possibility. I am not sure that many right hon. and hon. Members would be prepared to bet on that eventuality not occurring over the next 40 years. Make no mistake—those weapons of mass destruction will not be tolerated in an independent Scotland. The refusal to take that into account when allocating £179 billion beggars belief.

8.12 pm

Mr Jamie Reed (Copeland) (Lab): So it is that I, as a democratic socialist, support every word of the motion before us in the name of the Prime Minister, because the truth is that the preservation of our national security does not wear the colours of any political party.

I begin by reaching out to all those in our country who do not support the retention and renewal of the UK's nuclear deterrent. This is a frequently polarised debate, but I want to say to those who oppose renewal that I understand how and why they feel the way that they do. I understand how and why their opposition to nuclear weapons motivates them to vote and act in certain ways, and I understand their fears. Like those people, like every defence worker and trade union representative of defence workers, and like the people who live in the communities where those jobs are so valued, I hope for a world free of nuclear weapons. I wish that we could uninvent those weapons of mass destruction, but we cannot, and will never be able to do so.

The world is an increasingly difficult and challenging place. The complexities we face in international affairs, foreign relations and diplomatic matters are increasing,

not receding, and even if a mood swept our country that saw unilateral nuclear disarmament as desirable, I would argue against such a move. Multilateralism is the only way forward for our country. We can and should only divest ourselves of our nuclear weapons when those who seek to do us harm divest themselves of their nuclear arsenals too. The arguments for a multilateral approach to the UK's nuclear deterrent, our obligations under the non-proliferation treaty, our responsibilities towards our allies, global security, and more, are compelling.

An American diplomat told me recently about an emerging view on the left and right of American politics that the United States is tired of both fighting and paying for Europe's safety. American politicians, in Congress and elsewhere, increasingly think that their European partners are not pulling their weight. There is already a long-term diplomatic pivot taking place in US foreign policy. Other alliances outside of Europe are being sought and established. That is the right of the US, but we risk the strategic relationship that we have enjoyed with it if we conspicuously fail to take the necessary steps to maintain our own nuclear deterrent.

Alongside this, we have a belligerent Russia on the borders of the European Union—a Russia that is now not only replacing its nuclear fleet but renewing it with a new programme of research, development and manufacture for a new generation of nuclear missiles. More concerning is the fact the Russian military has changed its nuclear engagement protocols. The new protocols permit the use of nuclear weapons in a conventional conflict in order to achieve “de-escalation”—an incredible proposition, but true none the less. Is this the time, with a weaker EU, an exasperated United States, and a sabre-rattling Russia, for the United Kingdom to abandon its nuclear deterrent? No, it is not.

Margaret Ferrier: Obviously the hon. Gentleman supports the renewal of Trident. Has he any idea why his colleagues in the Scottish Parliament do not?

Mr Reed: That is a matter for my friends in the Scottish Parliament.

It is the policy of the Labour party to retain and renew our nuclear deterrent. As a Labour Member of Parliament, steeped in my party's traditions, proud of its achievements, and excited by its possibilities, I will support my party's policy tonight. But for the first time ever, we have witnessed the leader of the Labour party stand at the Dispatch Box and argue against the policy of the party that he leads. That is unprecedented. Moreover, this reckless, juvenile, narcissistic irresponsibility makes me fearful for the future of the party that I love. The sheer stupidity of this approach should be dragged out into the light and seen for what it is, because renewal is not only Labour party policy but the settled will of the country, and every parliamentary decision relating to it will have been taken by 2020.

Further to that, Lord Kinnock has repeatedly warned—and it looks as though he will have to say this to the Labour party for the second time in my lifetime—that “the British people will not vote for unilateral disarmament. And that reality has to be dealt with.”

A policy of unilateral nuclear disarmament is a bar to being elected. A democratic socialist party with this policy can campaign to rid this country of poverty, to restore the national health service, to rebuild our economy,

[Mr Jamie Reed]

and to make sure that every man, woman and child in every community in our country enjoys equality of opportunity—but campaigning is all that it will ever do, because a policy of unilateral nuclear disarmament will ensure that we will never govern. This logic is inescapable, and the leader of the Labour party knows it.

Chris Law: There is a little flaw in the hon. Gentleman's argument. The SNP has 56 out of 59 seats here and in the Scottish Government, and we all hold to the position of unilateral disarmament. To give him some hope, we are doing what he hopes his party can do in future.

Mr Reed: I commend the hon. Gentleman for that audacious and fundamentally incorrect intervention. I really do applaud his audacity.

The logic is inescapable, and the leader of the Labour party knows it. So we are forced to accept that the refusal to support the established policy of the Labour party and to acknowledge the achievements of the greatest Labour Government is not just a knowing embrace of electoral defeat but a real, studied and determined desire to split the Labour party. The manifesto I stood on at the last election pledged to renew our nuclear deterrent. The manifesto that I will stand on at the next election will pledge to renew our nuclear deterrent, whether the leader of the Labour party likes it or not. That will be true for hundreds of colleagues on the Labour Benches.

I urge all colleagues on the Labour Front Bench to respect the democratic processes of the Labour party, to respect the conference decision of the Labour party, and to vote with the established policy of the Labour party, and if they cannot do that, to return to the Back Benches.

8.18 pm

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): I am against the renewal of Trident for all the reasons that have been so ably laid out by my hon. Friends here today. I am mainly against it because, morally, it is a corrupt concept. It is a weapon that is designed to kill people indiscriminately. The Prime Minister said earlier that she was willing to take the decision to kill hundreds of thousands of innocent men, women and children, but she should perhaps take some advice from the International Court of Justice, which says:

“States must never make civilians the object of attack and must consequently never use weapons that are incapable of distinguishing between civilian and military targets.”

In my time as an MP, I have held many surgeries around my constituency. People come to me with their problems and I try to help them as best I can. Sometimes people come to my surgeries in tears because their disability benefits have been cut because the UK Government do not have the money to give them a decent life. People come to me saying that they have been unfairly sanctioned because the welfare budget has to be trimmed because there is no money. Women who were born in the 1950s come to my surgeries to tell me that they have to miss out on their pensions because there is no money. When Conservative and Labour Members tell us that it does not matter how much the Trident replacement costs, I tell them to come to my surgery, look those people in the face and tell them that.

If Conservative and Labour Members want to spend up to £205 billion on replacing Trident, they should think about the consequences for people. Incidentally, those consequences stretch right into my constituency, to the Army base that has been there for 250 years. Fort George is on a Ministry of Defence list of sites considered for closure because there is no money. That is the benefit of MOD spend, but it will be taken away from conventional, hard-working and valuable service personnel to pay for useless weapons of mass destruction.

Mr Jamie Reed: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Drew Hendry: No, I am going to carry on.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Steven Paterson) has said, our future threats include cyber-attacks. There has been hardly any talk of the future investment needed to make sure that we make vulnerable systems invulnerable. I want to quote—[*Interruption.*] I know that the hon. Member for South Leicestershire (Alberto Costa) likes to intervene, but he rarely says anything of value. The Defense Science Board final report, “Resilient, Military Systems and the Advanced Cyber Threat”—

Alberto Costa *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. There can be only one Member on his feet at one time. The hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry) is not willing to give way, because he wants other colleagues to be able to get in. Come on through, Drew Hendry.

Drew Hendry: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I have lost a wee bit of time, but I will be as quick as I can.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): Does my hon. Friend share my concern about the spiralling cost, which is even more difficult to calculate because of the massive fluctuations in the currency market as a result of the Brexit vote?

Drew Hendry: I can only agree with my colleague. I was about to make a point about the vulnerability of the military systems. The Defense Science Board report states:

“The United States cannot be confident that our critical Information Technology (IT) systems will work under attack from a sophisticated and well-resourced opponent utilizing cyber capabilities in combination with all of their military and intelligence capabilities.”

We face the prospect of investing in a military dodo, but the situation is even worse because it can be hacked and used against us, and the Government plan to spend up to £205 billion on it.

I will not vote for Trident renewal tonight, for all of the good reasons that have been laid out, one after another, by my colleagues, but the main reason is that it is an obscenity.

8.23 pm

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): This debate is welcome, but I think that many Members will realise that it is not entirely necessary. The Government have initiated a debate the main purpose of which is to create, or highlight, discord in the Labour party.

Frankly, however, the Labour party does not need any encouragement from the Government—it is doing a very good job of that itself.

More seriously, the four main threats to the UK identified in the strategic defence and security review were terrorism, the resurgence of state-based threats, the impact of technology and the erosion of the rules-based international order. Trident replacement, which will use 6% of our defence budget, will partially address one of those threats, namely the state-based threat from Russia.

As we have heard this evening, if we go ahead and build four submarines, they will cost us more than £31 billion. Five years ago, the figure was £21 billion. Given that the Scottish National party does not want the system, the cost is irrelevant to its Members, but those of us who want some sort of system, including the Liberal Democrats, are entitled to hear from the Government what the actual cost will be. We have heard figures that range from £179 billion to £200 billion-plus. We are also entitled to some clarity on whether the Government have finally tied down the uncertain issue of who will actually manage the system.

Our position is that we believe that we should retain a nuclear capability. We believe that the threats are such that the United Kingdom needs to have a nuclear deterrent, but we do not believe in a like-for-like replacement, which is why we will vote against the Government today. The party's position has been debated at great length over the years. It was agreed in 2013, but it is still being debated, including at this very moment.

We seek to take a step down the nuclear ladder, but believe that giving up nuclear weapons in a unilateralist way—simply saying, “We no longer wish to retain nuclear weapons”—would not give us any leverage in non-proliferation discussions. Keeping a seat at the negotiating table is important, and having a smaller nuclear capability would ensure that we build submarines and retain the skills that, as we have heard, are so important for the country's nuclear capability.

While a move away from continuous at-sea deterrence would strike some as leaving us more vulnerable, it would still mean that we had a nuclear capability and would keep many options open in a way that unilateralism would not. Indeed, it would make a contribution to our non-proliferation commitments. I asked the Prime Minister to explain how like-for-like replacement would comply with article VI, but I am afraid that I received no answer.

It is not 1980. Although we face threats, we do not face the existential threats that we faced then. It is a different world, and there is a way that we can begin to climb down another rung of the nuclear ladder and provide others with an incentive to do so as well. We have the opportunity to do that, and I hope that we will take it now.

8.26 pm

Mhairi Black (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (SNP): Government Members seem to have the idea that we in the Scottish National party are against nuclear weapons for some kind of romanticised reason, but the reality is that we are against nuclear weapons and renewing Trident for logical reasons.

First, we have to remember the fact that, fundamentally, Trident is a weapon. We have already established that we would not fire first, so the only time that we would ever use this weapon would be if somebody launched a nuclear strike against us. To be frank, that would mean

that we were all dead anyway. If I am dying, I do not care if we send a weapon back; I am more worried about the one that is coming towards me.

We keep hearing the phrase, “We can't predict the future”, but if we are going to make defence policy, surely we have to think wisely about what we are deterring. What are the threats that we face? The 2015 national security strategy set out the tier 1 threats faced by the UK: international terrorism, climate change and cybercrime. How many terrorist attacks have nuclear weapons protected us or France from? The answer is zero. They have got hee-haw to do with climate change or cybercrime, so that brings us back to the argument that they are a deterrent, but only nine countries in the world have nuclear weapons. How come the other 180-plus countries do not feel the need to have this deterrent?

What other arguments are there for keeping Trident? We keep hearing that we need to keep it for the sake of jobs. Yes, it involves skilled engineers, scientists and workers who work very hard and are very talented, but why do we not invest the billions of pounds that we are proposing to spend on it in our energy and engineering sectors? Why do we not use that money in our renewable energy sectors? Climate change is a tier 1 threat to us, so why do we not spend that money on trying to tackle it?

If these weapons are not a security necessity and they are not necessary to save jobs, that prompts the question: what are they for? The fact of the matter is that this is all really about the UK maintaining a permanent place on the UN Security Council. As the hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat), who is unfortunately not in his seat, made clear, these weapons serve no purpose other than satisfying the ego of the British establishment. This is about us putting our stamp on a world from which we are isolating ourselves more and more.

Too many times, I have sat in this Chamber and heard, as my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry) eloquently said, that we cannot afford to look after the disabled, we cannot afford to look after our unemployed and we cannot afford to pay pensions on time. We have heard Conservative Members say that they are the Government making the difficult choices, but the very same people who made the argument for austerity are now telling us that we can afford to write a blank cheque for these useless weapons. And for what? To preserve Westminster's self-indulgent image of importance. This is all part of the Government's long-term economic sham.

I want to provide some context about the reality of what this means. Paisley Gilmour Street, in my constituency, is the busiest railway station in Scotland outside Glasgow and Edinburgh, and it is one of the main routes on which nuclear waste is transported. Used nuclear rods come through my constituency, not in the dead of night but during the day when people are standing on the platform waiting to go to work in Greenock, or wherever else. If a mistake was made and an accident happened, it would be the equivalent of a dirty bomb. I put it to the Government that they, and their obsession with nuclear weapons, are one of the greatest threats facing my constituents.

8.30 pm

Mr Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op): I rise to support the motion. The Prime Minister said earlier that the first duty of a Government is to protect

[Mr Adrian Bailey]

their citizens. I would add that the first duty of an Opposition, if they hope to become a Government, is to convince the electorate and the public at large that they will, and above all that they can, do the same. The Opposition cannot be ambiguous on that commitment. I fully understand those in our party who feel that their ethical values and the values of the Labour party are incompatible with that stance, but the public—the electorate—do not feel that our values and ethics are an adequate defence in the face of military aggression from countries that might threaten us.

I am old enough to remember campaigning in the days when Labour's policy was unilateralism. I remember the cruel caricature of Labour's defence policy, which was somebody standing with their hands up, labelled "Labour's defence policy." Regrettably, it resonated with many of Labour's traditional voters. The feeling that, above all, people are entitled to security transcends voting behaviour, social class and income. It goes right across the piece, and Labour paid a very high price for failing to recognise that in the 1980s.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes) talked about how we succeeded in changing Labour's former policy. Change it we did, and since then, whatever disagreements the electorate have had with Labour, they have not been about defence. We have won three general elections with a multilateral defence policy. In fact, multilateral defence and an independent nuclear deterrent have been our policy for the last six general elections and were a manifesto commitment in the last general election. That is backed by trade unions, which recognise that any removal of Trident would have a huge impact on levels of employment and skills, which are absolutely essential to people's welfare.

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr Bailey: I am sorry, I will not give way, because too many others want to speak.

Above all, the policy is backed by the public. For that policy to be overturned, four thresholds have to be met. The first is that there must be a huge improvement in international relations. That has quite clearly not happened—things have deteriorated. Russia's lowering of the threshold for the use of nuclear weapons, its activities in Ukraine, the situation in North Korea and the ability of terrorists to take over a country and possibly acquire nuclear technology mean that the world is much more dangerous.

The second threshold is that there must be a compelling change of technology that would render nuclear submarines irrelevant. That has not happened. The third is a financial capacity that renders us unable to build them. That has not happened. The last is overwhelming evidence of public support shifting against the deterrent. That clearly has not happened.

8.35 pm

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab): As we know, it was the famous post-war Labour Government who first acquired Britain's nuclear deterrent. Clement Attlee had just been elected Prime Minister when America dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima in 1945. He realised in an instant that the air raid wardens and fire

engines that had fought to limit the damage done by Hitler's bombs were now useless in the face of the awesome destructive power of this new weapon. He reasoned that the only way to protect the population was to have the ability to fight back, and therefore to deter the initial threat.

Since then, Labour has for the most part adopted a multilateralist stance on disarmament, believing that while other countries possess nuclear weapons, Britain should not disarm unilaterally. Our 2015 manifesto maintained our commitment to a minimum credible independent nuclear capability, and to looking at further reductions in global stockpiles. By 2025, the UK will have achieved a 65% reduction in the size of its nuclear stockpile.

This Parliament has always taken our disarmament goals seriously, but the world is too unstable and unpredictable right now to contemplate getting rid of our main defence strategies. Part of the abolitionist argument generally relies on the belief that nuclear weapons would not work against the current threats to the modern world from terrorist organisations such as Daesh and Boko Haram. However, just because they would not be used to combat such threats, that does not negate their use as a deterrent against other or future unknown threats. Those with whom we do not always agree—Russia, Iran, China and North Korea, for example—understand the relevance of nuclear weapons and have sought to increase their own capabilities.

I am proud of the superb engineering skills that are nurtured in this highly skilled industry. The MOD has stated that

"maintaining and sustaining the UK's nuclear deterrent supports over 30,000 UK jobs and makes a significant contribution to the UK economy".

Angela Crawley: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs Lewell-Buck: No, I will not give way.

That is why both Unite and the GMB support the renewal of our submarines. Scrapping Trident would place skilled manufacturing jobs in my region in jeopardy. There are 20 businesses across the north-east involved in the supply chain for Britain's Navy defence submarines. Our region is at risk of losing millions of pounds of funding after Brexit. I know from personal bitter experience of the demise of coal and shipbuilding that job losses on such a scale will lead to communities being wiped out. The fact is that if a decision is taken not to replace Trident, jobs will disappear and we will never see them again.

I acknowledge there remains an absence of a truly definitive cost for renewal, but one thing we can all agree on is that it will be incredibly expensive, and that needs to be monitored. The reality is that either we have Trident or we do not, and if we have it, we have to pay for it. If nuclear missiles were cheap or easy to come by, the world would be in serious trouble. The deterrent represents the ultimate security guarantee for the UK, and I believe that, right now, the potential costs of retaining it are worth more than the risks of disarmament.

8.38 pm

Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab): I believe we should oppose the maintenance of the continuous at-sea deterrent. For me, the arguments are both moral and practical. I will take the moral argument first.

I believe it is important that we all give full consideration to the scale of destruction that modern nuclear weapons can deliver. I want to read out a message from the mayor of Hiroshima in a recent statement:

“On August 6, 1945, a single atomic bomb rendered Hiroshima a scorched plain and tens of thousands were burned in flames. By year's end, 140,000...lives had been taken. Those who managed to survive, their lives grotesquely distorted, were left to suffer serious physical and emotional after effects compounded by discrimination and prejudice. Nuclear weapons are an absolute evil and ultimate inhumanity.”

Louise Haigh: In the same statement, the mayor of Hiroshima called on us all to share the sincere message of their hibakusha:

“No one else should ever suffer as we have”.

Does my hon. Friend not share my concern that this latest round of renewal makes it difficult to ignore the fact that we are moving against our international duty into an era of permanent armament?

Margaret Greenwood: My hon. Friend makes a good case, and I agree with her.

Contemporary nuclear weapons are capable of delivering much greater levels of devastation, and they are eight to 10 pounds heavier than those that hit Hiroshima and Nagasaki. One modern missile with 12 warheads could wipe out a city of 10 million people and leave it uninhabitable. As the International Court of Justice put it back in 1996:

“The destructive power of nuclear weapons cannot be contained in either space or time. They have the potential to destroy all civilization and the entire ecosystem of the planet.”

That is chilling, and it is important to keep hold of that vision of horror when considering Trident renewal.

I recently visited Woodchurch high school in my constituency, where I met the school council, which comprises pupils from each of the different year groups aged between 11 and 16. I asked them who felt that we should renew Trident. There was a slight sense of agitation in the room, and I wondered whether they were just a little shy on the topic. I then asked if anyone was definitely opposed to the renewal, and every hand shot up in the air without hesitation. The decisions that we make about nuclear deterrence today will have an impact on our children for decades, and it is important to remember that we are making a decision for the next generation.

The defence challenges that we now face are different from those in the post-1945 era when the world seemed divided into ideological blocs and the threat came primarily from other states, principally the Soviet Union. An attack was thought of in terms of a conventional military attack or a nuclear strike. Yes, there are concerns over the intentions of President Putin's Russia. The annexation of Crimea and Russian involvement in the civil war in Ukraine has had a destabilising effect on security in central and eastern Europe, but we must also counter the threat from non-state actors such as terrorist groups. Nuclear weapons will not enable us to meet that threat, and money allocated to Trident could mean that the defence budget is not focused on the most serious challenges that we face. Trident's replacement is projected to be operational for 30 years from the early 2030s. Is it

possible to be sure that it will be an effective deterrent in 2060? There is plenty of evidence to suggest that it will not.

I recently attended a meeting addressed by Lord Browne, the Labour Defence Secretary in 2006-07. He made a compelling argument against the renewal of Trident, focusing particularly on two practical issues: cyber-security and the detection of submarines by enemy forces. He warned that NATO countries cannot be confident that their nuclear defence systems would be able to survive an attack from a sophisticated and well-resourced opponent that was utilising cyber-capabilities in combination with its military and intelligence capabilities.

The Prime Minister spoke about the value of nuclear submarines patrolling our seas unseen and undetected. That may well be the case today, but it is not a given for the future. There is a real threat that with the increase in under-sea detection technology, the location of submarines is more likely to be compromised, thus undermining the fundamental rationale of continuous at-sea deterrence, which relies on submarines remaining undetected. There is also a real risk that advancement in detection technology will outpace any advancement in counter-measures.

It is important to take into account all the jobs that are reliant on Trident, and that a credible industrial strategy is created and a cogent plan signed off before any action is taken to not renew it. Jobs, skills, and incomes should be protected. I believe, however, that there is a real risk that these expensive weapons may become obsolete over the period of their lives, and we would be better off investing in a defence strategy that addresses the real dangers that we face from current strategic threats.

8.43 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate. This issue has been framed as contentious, controversial and sensitive, and it has been given unneeded attention from various sections of our media and political activists within and without this House. Most unfortunate of all is the fact that too many concerns have been proven to be political dogma, masked all too often by false and misguided idealism. Some in this House ignore the reality, but we must debate that reality and present it to the House. I fully support Trident renewal, and in the Northern Ireland Assembly, aerospace, defence, security and space have been identified as priorities in the programme for government. Therefore, if jobs are coming off the back of Trident, we in Northern Ireland will take them—if they are available, send them our way.

As everyone knows, our national security is no game, and Members will be hard-pushed to find someone who disagrees with the fact that the world is over-armed and that we need to move away from war, violence and weapons with nuclear capabilities. However, we have not yet realised that ideal world, and to ignore that would be to put our country and its people in danger. Our country would be less protected than it was yesterday, and we would be more threatened by enemies who would immediately be less deterred from attacking our country. We need to be prepared for the real world we live in, with all its inherent dangers. I continue to implore those opposed to a deterrent to consider that when we take all things into consideration and are rational about the issue, the arguments consistently and

[*Jim Shannon*]

overwhelmingly stack up on the renewal side of the argument. Our deterrent is a deterrent, not an aggressor or a destroyer. It is fit for purpose and will be used only for its purpose.

Not only does Trident act as a deterrent and have the potential to be extremely effective, the efficacy of the system is testimony to the continued strength of British defence. Trident forms an integral part of our strong and ready defence of a strong and proud country. Over 30 countries have weapons of mass destruction, be they nuclear or biological. The list contains our closest allies in NATO, but not all of those countries are in NATO. Were we to remove our deterrent, we would be stepping off the world stage and making our country a less significant player around the globe, and a less significant partner. We need the United Kingdom to remain strong. We need the United Kingdom now more than ever at the top table when it comes to global security. Scaling back our capabilities at a time when the world is more armed than ever, and is an incredibly volatile place, is not the way the go. The aims of disarmament need to press ahead. It is an aim that I am sure we all hope will come to fruition one day, but the ideal world does not yet exist and the context is not yet set for today to be that day for the United Kingdom.

Trident ensures, ultimately, that the United Kingdom would be able to stand up for itself even in the worst scenario imaginable. It sends out a strong message that no matter how many people talk down our standing as a nation, we remain one of the most staunchly defended nations on this earth, ready for whatever our enemies might throw at us. What is contentious about defending our country? What is controversial about preparing our country for the worst? What is sensitive about ensuring our country can react appropriately to the unthinkable? When cool heads come together and rational minds meet, the correct decision on this issue should court no controversy at all. Renewing our nuclear deterrent is the right thing to do; indeed, it is the only thing we can do. We in the Democratic Unionist party will support the Government tonight and join them in the Lobby to retain Trident and have Trident renewal.

8.46 pm

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): I was elected by 15,000 voters with a 7,000 majority on a Labour manifesto in favour of Trident and multilateral disarmament. I am aware, however, of people in my constituency and in the Labour party who are against Trident. Indeed, I was a member of CND and am related to Henry Richard, the apostle of peace from Tregaron.

I need to go through the arguments that have been deployed against Trident. The first is that nuclear arms are awful and appalling weapons. Well, we know that and that is why they are such an awful deterrent. They are a deterrent because they are terrible weapons. The second is that these arms are obsolete and redundant because of various technological advances. If that is the case, why are Russia, China, France and the US investing in them? The technologists say they are not redundant. It is said that they cannot combat cybercrime or terrorism, but they are not designed to do so. Thirdly, it is said that they cost a lot of money. Well, £30 billion, plus £10 billion

contingency, is a lot of money. It is something like £1.2 billion a year just for the capital costs, which is approximately 6% of defence procurement spending. That is a lot of money, but it would not transform the NHS or our conventional armaments, and it supports something like 32,000 jobs.

The key issue is this: do these weapons deter? As a member of the Council of Europe, when I talk to Ukrainian MPs they say, "If we had maintained a nuclear deterrent, the Russians wouldn't have invaded Crimea and eastern Ukraine." When I speak to MPs from Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, they say to me, "We've got Russian minorities, just like Ukraine. Russia will invade us. If the UK doesn't have a nuclear deterrent, what are you going to do—come up with your conventional arms?" Our enemies will say that they will use tactical nuclear weapons and blow up Coventry. What are we going to do? Let them blow it up so that they can rewrite history and say, "It's like Hiroshima, we saved lives?"

It is not difficult to think of scenarios where nuclear blackmail is effective, whether involving Russia or North Korea. That is sufficient reason to support a minimum nuclear deterrent. We could withdraw and say that we will be part of a nuclear alliance, letting France and America protect us. But what if France unilaterally disarms? What if Donald Trump comes along? Is he going to support us? I think not.

My position is the same as Aneurin Bevan's. He died the year I was born—it was not my fault, by the way. He was, basically, a multilateralist like me. He understood that the purpose of these awful weapons was to sustain peace and prevent war. The purpose of the deterrence is to save lives, not to take them, and to deter aggression, not to attack. We all wish that these weapons did not exist, but the question is—and I respect the fact that it is a difficult question: do we want to take responsibility for the deaths of people if we do not have the deterrent and that provokes aggression?

Our nuclear capability has halved since the cold war. We have only 1% of the current nuclear stockpile of 17,000 nuclear weapons and our plan is to reduce their number further. In my view, we need—this is the lesser of two evils—a minimum capability. I wish we did not, but we do. The acid test is this: with nuclear weapons, will more or fewer people die? In my judgment, fewer people will die, and therefore we need to support the motion.

8.50 pm

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): I rise to speak in favour of the motion, for the following reasons. First, it is the policy on which I was elected. My Labour colleagues and I were elected on the basis of a manifesto commitment to support the retention of an independent nuclear deterrent, and that is what we must do tonight. As a committed democrat, I intend to fulfil the mandate given to me by the 15,000 people in Aberavon who elected me, and my colleagues should do the same and fulfil the mandate they have from the 9.3 million people who voted Labour last May.

The second reason is jobs. As a Member of Parliament proud to represent the steelmaking heartland of Britain and Wales, I am acutely aware of the industrial implications that a vote against the motion would have. Across its lifetime, Trident will support almost 26,000 jobs, including

13,000 in advanced manufacturing. It will affect more than 1,000 businesses in almost 450 towns and cities across Britain. Scrapping Trident would further skew the economy, defence being one of the few sectors reliably and consistently creating sustainable, highly skilled and well-paid jobs outside London. As Unite the union stated just a few days ago, there can be no

“moral case for a trade union accepting the obliteration of thousands of its members’ jobs and the communities in which they live being turned into ghost towns.”

Thirdly, some years before entering this place, I worked for the British Council as director of its St Petersburg office. I have seen at first hand the nature of the Putin regime. I was withdrawn from Russia owing to concerns about my personal security, after the Kremlin’s campaign of intimidation in the wake of the poisoning of Alexander Litvinenko. Just remember that. This is a regime that responds to having been caught red handed murdering a British citizen on British soil using nuclear material with denial, aggression and intimidation. My experiences in Russia convinced me of the need to retain our nuclear deterrent. We must be able to stand up to bullies.

We live in an unstable and unpredictable world. We know that expansionist, belligerent regimes such as the one currently governing Russia thrive in such conditions. The Russian Government have pressed forward with the development of the Dolgorukiy ballistic missile submarine and the next generation of cruise missiles. This is not the type of missile that we can hope James Bond will sneak in and disarm. The threat represented by this type of weapon can be prevented only through deterrence. Nuclear weapons exist precisely so that we will never have to use them.

I would dearly like to live in a world without nuclear weapons, but we must engage with the world as it is, not how we would like it to be. We must be realists, not fantasists. Deterrence has kept the peace for over 70 years. To give up the capacity for independent action would not only expose us to nuclear blackmail but severely weaken our standing in the world. So I ask all hon. Members to stand up for Britain when they enter the Division Lobby this evening and to join me in supporting the motion.

8.54 pm

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): In November, the UK Government published the latest strategic defence and security review. At that time, scant assessment was made of the defence and security implications of Brexit. This can now only be interpreted as both naive and irresponsible. Eight months later and Parliament is being asked to forge ahead with defence spending policies based on the assumption that nothing has changed. But everything has changed: our relationship with Europe; the UK’s role in the world; even the Prime Minister and much of the Cabinet. Surely now, with such a fundamental shift in national strategy and circumstances, the time has come to revisit at least the principles of the defence spending review.

This commitment—I use last November’s costings—would tie up at least one third of the defence procurement budget, year on year, for the next 20 years. Questioning the wisdom of squandering huge sums on four Successor submarines is not a matter of being soft on defence; it is a matter of acknowledging the hard reality of a post-Brexit economy, of security threats utterly unlike those

of the cold war, of technological advances and of the need to reassess the United Kingdom’s place in the world.

Surely now is the time for investment in defending against those threats that will be with us for decades to come, and surely there must be a priority for defence cyber-security. November’s spending review championed the national cyber-security plan, which has been allocated £1.9 billion for the next four years, yet the greatest part of this plan is to address civilian cybercrime, and only £90 million is specifically allocated to defence cyber.

We know that our conventional armed forces are under strength and ill equipped, and as Chilcot noted, such deficiencies put our soldiers in danger when deployed in danger zones. A national newspaper reported yesterday that the Army is placing under-trained recruits in front-line roles. Conventional forces, working in tandem with international law, can deliver peace and stability through peacekeeping. Trident can never do that.

I understand that the Prime Minister visited Wales today and had meetings with the Labour First Minister, Carwyn Jones. I understand that my nation’s role in Brexit negotiations was discussed, and I understand that they discussed the future of the Union. The future of Scotland’s presence in the Union is now very much in question. Only a couple of years ago, Labour’s First Minister offered a warm welcome to Trident in Pembrokeshire at the prospect of just such an eventuality. Under pressure from his own Assembly Members, he backed off, but he will be encouraged by Labour Back Benchers today. My country has suffered the legacy of industrial decay and suffered at the hands of the poverty of Welsh Labour’s economic ambition and the poverty of its vision for Wales. But we will not accept the mantra of “jobs at any cost.”

If Trident leaves Faslane, the Westminster Government will need to find a base in England, because we are not so poor in spirit as to accept the toxic status symbol of Britain’s imagined standing on the world stage. The security of Wales is dependent on the security of the global community, not on antiquated technology. My Plaid Cymru colleagues and I will vote against this motion.

8.57 pm

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Too often today we have heard that Trident is classed as the ultimate deterrent. Yet the great warmonger, Tony Blair, is already on record as saying that it is a status symbol that “serves no military purpose”. What it means is that some others aspire to have that status symbol. We do not argue that we need to stockpile chemical and biological weapons to deter rogue states, so why do we argue that we need nuclear weapons? If we encourage a reckless gambler to play poker, he will not be afraid to go “all in” with his chips, so why do we argue that we should risk nuclear Armageddon as a possible deterrent? That is not the way to go. The only country ever to have suffered a nuclear attack is Japan, and it has never felt the need to get a nuclear weapon as a deterrent against a future attack. Instead, Japan makes the clear and logical argument that we need to rid the world of nuclear weapons.

The new Successor submarines, we have heard, will cost approximately £200 billion, yet they will not even protect us from the tier 1 threats identified in the 2015

[Alan Brown]

SDSR. For me, it is incomprehensible to have a review that leads to 35% of the defence capital allocation going to a tier 2 threat when at least six higher-ranked risks were identified in the SDSR. Of these tier 1 threats, it is clear that Trident does not protect us from terrorism or from cyber-attacks for which the nuclear systems will be a top target. Some of the arguments we have heard today, such as that nuclear weapons guarantee us peace, are pieces of nonsense.

The argument for job creation, at a cost of £200 billion, is also nonsensical. If we are to believe the figure from the Ministry of Defence, 31,000 jobs will be created over the lifetime of Trident. At £6.5 million per job, that is the most expensive job creation scheme in history. It is actually a job creation scheme in reverse, given that it is risking jobs in the Clyde shipyards, and other men in the conventional forces—in the Army and the Navy—are being paid off to subsidise Trident.

What could we do with that money? We could spend more on renewables fabrication. We could engage in oil exploration off the west coast of Scotland, which nuclear subs have prevented. There would be alternative shipbuilding possibilities. We could invest in carbon capture and storage, and stimulate coal mining again. There could be infrastructure upgrades, and specific regeneration funding for the communities in which losses might be felt most.

Labour Members keep saying that they are worried about losing their heartlands. One of the appealing aspects of the leave vote was the fact that extra money could be spent on the national health service. Labour Members could now go to those heartlands and argue that the £2.4 billion annual cost of Trident—that is £50 million a week—could be spent on the NHS. Labour Members have also said that the argument against Trident was lost in the 1980s, but the SNP have won elections in 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2016 on an anti-Trident platform. Given the Labour party's internal nuclear warfare, we will go on winning in Scotland: that is a fact.

Part of the thrust of today's debate has been worry about rogue states. I must say, and I want to put this on the record, that I also worry about the possibility of a Donald Trump, or one of the wannabe Prime Ministers in the Conservative party—the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), or the right hon. Member for North Somerset (Dr Fox)—getting his hands on the red button. As Billy Connolly said, you wouldn't trust them with a TV remote control, let alone that red button.

Let me end by quoting some lines from a song that I listened to last night:

“Cos when the madman flips the switch
The nuclear will go for me.”

Those lines come from “The Lunatics Have Taken Over The Asylum”. Nothing has changed since 1981, when it was written, and we certainly should not be signing a blank cheque for Trident.

9.1 pm

Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): Over our recent history, Parliament has held many debates about the decision to send our armed

forces into combat on our behalf. Throughout those important discussions, a single principle has united all Members of Parliament: the requirement to protect human life, and specifically to act at all times to minimise the impact of violent conflict on civilians. In modern times, that principle has been accepted by all parties and each individual Government in every theatre of combat.

In January 2004, the then Armed Forces Minister said, in relation to the Iraq war,

“We regard any loss of life as deeply regrettable and we take our obligations to avoid or minimise casualties extremely seriously. Steps to avoid such casualties are integrated into every aspect of military operations.”—[*Official Report*, 7 January 2004; Vol. 416, c. 141WH.]

That approach has been adopted by successive Governments. In November 2010, the current Secretary of State for International Trade, then Secretary of State for Defence, said:

“The prevention of civilian casualties was of paramount concern to force commanders operating in Iraq and the risk of this occurring was minimised at all times by the tactics and training of our forces.”—[*Official Report*, 3 November 2010; Vol. 517, c. 847W.]

The same approach has been underlined by the current Government. In October 2014, the present Secretary of State for Defence, who is in the Chamber, explained how the strategy underlined our current combat operations, saying that

“the United Kingdom seeks to avoid civilian casualties.”—[*Official Report*, 20 October 2014; Vol. 586, c. 668.]

Let us be clear. It is a long-standing doctrine that we should seek to take all possible precautions to minimise the killing of civilians in conflict. That moral objective has formed an integral part of our military planning, and our armed forces are specifically trained in tactics that reinforce the commitment. It is that moral standpoint that has led the United Kingdom to join other countries in banning items such as chemical and biological weapons and cluster bombs. I agree with the approach, but just how does it square with Trident? I do not accept that this debate should take place in an ethical vacuum. Indiscriminate death on an unimaginable scale is the cold reality of nuclear war. It is literally unthinkable. The use of nuclear weapons would be a disaster for our planet and for our civilisation.

Mr Kevan Jones: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Ahmed-Sheikh: No, I will not.

The use of nuclear weapons would not only make us the exception to the rule in the international community, but run counter to every single pronouncement that has ever been made by every post-war Government about the UK military's terms of engagement. We have heard today that this Government and those on the Opposition Benches are prepared to support the renewal of Trident whatever the cost. That word “whatever” has borne very heavily upon this Chamber, not least in the context of the last week. It is not about “whatever.” Whatever the consequences? Whatever the cost? No, it cannot be about that; it is immoral, it is defunct, we should not be supporting it, and I will support my colleagues on the SNP Benches as we vote against the renewal of Trident this evening.

9.5 pm

Ms Margaret Ritchie (South Down) (SDLP): I come to this debate this evening along with my two colleagues in the Social Democratic and Labour party as pacifists—as people who strongly believe in nuclear disarmament and firmly believe that Trident and weapons of mass destruction are used to kill people in a very indiscriminate manner. For that reason, we will be going into the No Lobby tonight.

What we are debating today is the UK's own role as a nuclear power. In the last six years—the time I have spent in this House—I cannot recall having heard any Minister convincingly explain why the UK's nuclear arsenal provides any deterrent not already provided by the much larger arsenals of the allies. I have yet to hear any reason why nuclear weapons make Britain safer than non-armed states like Germany, Canada and Japan. There is no genuine security argument for the UK to spend these vast sums of money on weapons that can never be used, because the elephant in the room today is that this is about status, not safety. The reason the Government want to renew these weapons is not because they make us safer; it is because Ministers are afraid that without them the UK will further cease to be a world power.

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): Like my hon. Friend, I detect that this is about status. This is a vanity project, and the most thoughtful argument we have heard for the investment in Trident is actually that its use would be unthinkable.

Ms Ritchie: I thank my hon. Friend for his very helpful intervention. In that respect, I remember going to a talk in this House some months ago given by the former Secretary of State for Defence Lord Browne, now in the other place, who said Trident was no longer applicable because of issues to do with cyber-security and detection.

I have even heard it suggested that renewing Trident is necessary to protect the UK's place on the UN Security Council, but for a modern democracy weapons of mass destruction are no way to hold on to our place in the world. In truth, the calls to hold on to these weapons betray an insecurity that actually weakens the UK's standing in the world. How can the UK call on other countries to commit to non-proliferation when it tries to hold on to influence through status-symbol nuclear weapons? This is not a harmless indulgence: renewing Trident only adds to the tension between powers at a time when we should be trying to de-escalate conflict and bring understanding across the world.

That is to say nothing of the danger Trident has brought to the North channel and the Irish sea, particularly to the fishermen in my constituency who trawl in those waters. As the representative of a constituency that will face huge uncertainty as a result of the political decision that is likely to be taken here tonight, I understand the position of hon. Members whose constituencies rely on the construction of these submarines for jobs and livelihood, but there are better ways of investing in growth for their communities which do not involve nuclear weapons.

Common sense dictates that the UK will have to decommission one day; that may be this year or it may be in 30 years from now, but the economic transition

away from these submarines is inevitable—it is as inevitable as the decommissioning of the nuclear plants that has already taken place, but it is likely to take longer than projected. That is why we must take the £179 billion that Trident is set to cost over the next number of years and invest it in renewing peaceful, sustainable industry in the shipbuilding and port heartlands of our islands. That is how small nations make themselves indispensable on the world stage; it is not by threats or through weapons, but through long-sighted inward investment in skills and industry, through soft power and through commitment to peace and diplomacy. That should be the objective of this Government, because that is the objective of us on these Benches. We want to see peace and harmony, and we want to see growth and development. For those reasons, I, like my two colleagues, my hon. Friends the Members for Foyle (Mark Durkan) and for Belfast South (Dr McDonnell), will be in the No Lobby tonight.

9.10 pm

Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP): I have listened for the last few hours to the various arguments on Trident, but I have not yet heard a single new and compelling case for its replacement. I have heard that it will have a blank cheque and I have heard that there are a lot of unknown unknowns about the future, but we still have not been given a single reason for replacement.

One thing is certain: no one in this House truly knows what it is like to experience the horror, shock, pain and loss, and the complete devastation, of a nuclear strike. I am therefore going to turn to the words of a survivor of a nuclear holocaust who came here a few months ago, Setsuko Thurlow, who is 84 years old. She could be our mother, our grandmother, our aunt or our sister. She told us that in the final year of war in Japan, when she was 13 years old, the first thing she remembers of the bomb hitting was a blue-white light and her body being thrown up into the air. She was in a classroom of 14-year-olds, every one of whom died; she was the only survivor. As the dust settled and she crawled out of that building, she made out some figures walking towards her. She described them as walking ghosts, and when some of them fell to the ground, their stomachs, which were already expanded and full, fell out. Others had skin falling off them, and others still were carrying limbs. One was carrying their eyeballs in their hands. So when I hear the Prime Minister today say that she would be satisfied to press the button on hundreds of thousands of innocent men, women and children, I ask her to go and see Setsuko Thurlow—I am sure she would be delighted to have a discussion about what it is really like to experience a nuclear bomb. That in itself should be the complete reason why we do not replace Trident.

My second story takes me back a couple of years, when I was campaigning for Scottish independence, as were all my colleagues. During the campaign, I used a 1950s green goddess fire engine called the "Spirit of Independence". Hon. Members may not know that the green goddesses were built as vehicles to protect people in the event of a nuclear strike, but were discontinued in 2003 because they had not been used and would have been utterly useless—they were never replaced. They had a top speed of 45 mph, so if a nuclear strike happened nearby—for example, 30 miles from Glasgow—they would have been completely useless.

[Chris Law]

I am outlining two short and simple reasons why we need to consider the end of this programme. Houses need building, and there are many jobs in defence diversification, renewable energies and many other industries for the highly skilled people working on Trident. A million people go to food banks every year. We should hang our heads in shame at even the possible thought of sacrificing all—

Mr Ranil Jayawardena (North East Hampshire) (Con) *indicated dissent.*

Chris Law: The hon. Gentleman shakes his head, but he needs to listen to the facts. People are going hungry in this country, and people are going without jobs and are suffering. He may think that this status symbol is the most important thing, but I will not support it tonight and of course neither will my colleagues.

9.13 pm

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): To start with, it is a disgrace, and it is contemptuous of this Parliament, that we are being asked to take not just the biggest spending decision of this Parliament, but the biggest strategic defence decision probably of our lifetime on the basis of 14 lines of text; there is no plan, no budget and no security assessment, beyond a glib assertion that the world is going to be a very dangerous place in 30 years' time and we have to do something. I really do not think that is good enough. Yet again and as with many other things, this is presented here today, at this time and in this way, not for the benefit of the country, but for the benefit of the Conservative party, and that is disgraceful.

There has been much talk about deterrence, but—despite our questioning—no one has been able to tell us who or what has been deterred by our nuclear capability over the past 50 years. It certainly did not deter North Korea from getting nuclear weapons and it certainly has not deterred the misery and despotism in the middle east. In fact, it has been suggested that the only thing our possession of nuclear weapons will do is deter others from using theirs in a conflict because of the consequences.

That brings us to the morality of the entire question. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee West (Chris Law), I was dismayed by the Prime Minister's glib answer when he quizzed her on whether she would press the nuclear button. I say to the Prime Minister and to all those who support her motion tonight that they need to take a long, hard look in the mirror. They need to search their hearts and their consciences. They need to explain what kind of morality can justify the mass execution of non-combatants.

Mr Kevan Jones: The hon. Gentleman is making a powerful speech. He is making the moral argument against nuclear weapons, which I respect even though I disagree with it. Can he tell me why his party is prepared to join the nuclear alliance in NATO, sign up to the nuclear doctrine and accept a place under the nuclear umbrella when it is not prepared for this country to make a contribution?

Tommy Sheppard: As I was saying, we have to ask ourselves whether we are prepared to see the mass execution of non-combatants. Is it right to have the

genocide of innocents? Unless the hon. Gentleman and the other people who support this motion can answer those questions in the affirmative, there is no deterrent at all and it should not exist.

Mr Jones: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Tommy Sheppard: He has already intervened.

I want to say to colleagues on the Labour Benches who have spoken in favour of the Conservative Government's position that I very much regret that they seem to be hiding behind the defence trade unions in justifying how they will vote tonight. Surely they do not have to be very smart to understand that if we do not start this rearmament and do not commit this £200 billion, we will have enough money to give a financial guarantee to every worker in that industry and to redeploy their ingenuity, skills and experience into construction and engineering projects that would be for the benefit of humankind rather than for its destruction. I would have thought that the Labour party argued for that, but it has lost its moral compass on this and many other issues, which is why it is in its present situation.

I was elected to this Chamber on a manifesto, but this issue was not buried somewhere on page 13. Every leaflet that I put out during that campaign had the words "No Trident" in 24-point type. In every election address that I made, I told the electors that I would vote against this proposed rearmament at every opportunity. I was elected with 49.2% of the vote.

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): Does my hon. Friend share my utter dismay at the fact that the House is considering Trident renewal when civic Scotland, the Churches, the Scottish Trades Union Congress and MPs here and in the Scottish Parliament are all so firmly against having Trident on our soil?

Tommy Sheppard: I do indeed.

I was about to say that the people who came second and third in my seat at the election also agreed with the position that I take here today. In fact, more than 80% of the Scottish population voted in that election for political parties that oppose the proposition before us. That should be a problem for the Government. How can it be, when one nation in this United Kingdom is so absolutely against the proposition, that that nation and no one else gets vested with the delivery of the system and all the security consequences that come with it? If the Defence Secretary is so keen on this project, he might want to consider the construction of a naval base somewhere on the coast of Kent. He would then be able to have all the nuclear submarines he wanted without our condemnation.

Finally—I say this in response to the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones)—in such stand-offs, somebody somewhere has to put the gun down first. The alternative to rearmament and the creation of a more dangerous world is a process of disarmament to provide an example and the building of international alliances that will make our world safer. After all, that is our exact strategy on chemical or biological warfare so why not with nuclear weapons, too? The SNP will vote against this proposition tonight, and I hope that colleagues on the Labour Benches will search their hearts and come with us into the Lobby.

9.20 pm

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): Tonight I will vote against the renewal of the Trident nuclear weapons system and will join my SNP colleagues—the vast majority of Scottish MPs—in doing so. My opposition is based on three clear principles: the ridiculously high cost, its outdated ineffectiveness, and the morality of renewing a nuclear weapons system that we want to see the back of.

The new Trident system will cost in the region of £200 billion over the project's lifetime. At a time when we are telling disabled people that we cannot afford to continue paying their £30 a week employment support payments, when we are telling the WASPI women that we cannot afford proper transitional payments on their pensions and when this Government accept that food banks, on which 1.1 million people rely, are just part of the social security system, we have to question extraordinarily large items of spending, so we must certainly question the affordability of Trident. In the wake of the damning Chilcot report into the Iraq war, in which we read about how ill equipped our soldiers were for that theatre, perhaps some of the £205 billion would be better spent on our under-equipped but actually used conventional forces, on restoring recently cut areas of defence or even perhaps on some jets to go on the aircraft carrier that we just built without having any planes to use on it.

We have to consider the effectiveness and practicality of the system. Even the new Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr Hammond), recently said that holding nuclear weapons makes a state a target. Nuclear weapons are ineffective and useless as a deterrent against the modern threats we face. We cannot threaten cyber-criminals or the terror groups that we fight with a nuclear bomb. Climate change is not tempered by nuclear weapons. None of those era-defining threats to our way of life and to our safety and security are protected by the mutual assured destruction of nuclear weapons. Some of the support for Trident reminds me of the arms race that led to the first world war. Each power was trying to outgun the others in order to avoid war when all they were really doing was making war inevitable. It is claimed that Trident is the ultimate deterrent, but if it is a deterrent at all, it is a deterrent against the wars and threats of the past.

Finally, on morality, each of the nuclear missiles carried by the submarines has about eight times the power of the bomb dropped on Hiroshima, which caused absolute destruction. Imagine the destruction caused by just one of those warheads and then remember that each submarine carries forty. We must remember that nuclear weapons cannot be targeted; they are all about complete obliteration. They obliterate innocent men, women and children, which should be abhorred. While such weapons remain in our possession, there is a risk of them being used, which we cannot comprehend or countenance.

Trident is a cold war weapons system. It is outdated, immoral and extortionately expensive. Taking humanity, defence and our economy into account, we simply cannot afford to renew Trident tonight.

9.23 pm

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): Our new Prime Minister's main priority has been laid bare less than a week after she took office.

It is not to address the shambolic management of the NHS, the shameful proliferation of food banks across the UK, or an economy and currency on the edge of a dangerous precipice; her main priority is to spend billions on a new generation of weapons of mass destruction with the decision hurriedly forced through this place. We do not even know the full cost of renewal. Without knowing something as basic as how much it will cost, how is there any chance of proper scrutiny?

The new Prime Minister made much of her visit to Scotland last week. She was there to push her case for our so-called special Union. What is really special about this Union is the absolute lack of parity of esteem. Tonight 58 of Scotland's 59 democratically elected Members of Parliament will vote down this renewal. Thanks to our special Union, in which our larger neighbour dictates all terms of the relationship, the vote looks set to pass. This Government, with no mandate in Scotland, will force Scotland to be unwilling accomplices in their nuclear obsession. When we voice our disapproval, we are told to shut up and be thankful for the jobs. How many redundancies have taken place across the public sector in the past few years because, according to our former Chancellor, we need

"to live within our means."?—[*Official Report*, 25 November 2015; Vol. 1357, c. 602.]

Just how many more jobs could be created if we did not prioritise nuclear weapons over schools, hospitals, infrastructure and our conventional defence forces? While a bottomless pit of cash appears to be available for nukes, it is a source of great shame for all of us that we cannot afford to ensure that our military personnel are properly treated. One in 10 rough sleepers is a former service member. Sent off to fight wars in foreign countries, these ex-service personnel are denied the support that they deserve on their return from conflict. Although I commend the work of charitable organisations such as Soldiers Off The Street and Help for Heroes, it is nothing short of a national disgrace that they need to exist in the first place. These troops are prepared to put their lives on the line for our safety and we are not prepared to resource them, to look after them in service or to look after them on their return.

It is immoral to allow our soldiers to sleep rough on the streets; immoral to impose brutal welfare reform on the most vulnerable in society; immoral to watch the health service suffer from the ideology of a Government hell-bent on reform; and immoral to watch as food banks multiply exponentially. It is utterly immoral to spend billions on weapons that we will never, ever use and to place such a galling financial priority on them. The Prime Minister has made her priorities clear. Whether or not all my constituents agree with me on the issue of Trident, I am prioritising every one of them by voting against this new generation of weapons of mass destruction this evening.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. There are quite a lot of noisy private conversations taking place, including by hon. Members who have already addressed the House, and it is frankly rather discourteous to those who are waiting to do so.

9.27 pm

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): The case against renewing Trident is quite simple and plain to us on the SNP Benches and to the vast majority of the people of Scotland, the Scottish Parliament, Scotland's MPs and MSPs, and Scotland's churches and civic society. Despite that, the Government and most of those in the Labour party, as it thrashes about in its death throes, are willing to press ahead with these grotesque plans. To spend up to £205 billion on the lifetime cost of replacement is simply immoral.

When we look around us, we see families struggling to make ends meet, even when the parents are working full time. We see women who have had the opportunity to retire cruelly snatched away from them, leaving them to work up to an extra six years to access the pension to which they contributed all their working lives. We see austerity biting into Scotland's budget and budgets across the UK, as local services creak under the weight of cuts, cuts and more cuts. We see a new Prime Minister who, as her first priority, is apparently seeking to renew Trident at a time of austerity and real economic uncertainty following the Brexit vote. These weapons of mass destruction will cost billions of pounds. The people of Scotland and the people of the UK do not want them, do not need them and could never use them. The context of this decision is that debt, deficit and borrowing levels are forecast to get worse after Brexit, with more than £40 billion to be cut from public services by 2020. This is an absolute disgrace.

Let us look at the so-called security argument for Trident. It protects us from our enemies by providing a deterrent, we are told. Which enemies? Do we have any enemies that pose such a threat to us that we would destroy an entire continent to punish them? It makes us feel safe, we are told. Really? Tell that to Israel, which has nuclear weapons. Does anyone believe that those living in Israel feel secure? The biggest threat to our security is from terrorism. Trident does not protect us from that; in fact, it makes us a target. Does anyone seriously think that terrorists who are willing to wrap themselves in explosives and walk into a restaurant to detonate them will be deterred by Trident? That is the most likely and, most worryingly, the most common threat that we face in the new world order.

It is time for the UK Government to stop trying to strut around the world measuring the size of its warheads against the size of other countries' warheads. As for the argument that we need to renew Trident because of jobs, perhaps the trade union baron Len McCluskey should take that matter up with his counterparts in the Scottish Trades Union Congress. A report has shown that many of the skills used by Scottish workers could be transferred. To argue that Trident is important because of jobs is like saying that we should not find a cure for cancer for fear that cancer surgeons may be unemployed. We need to get a moral grip. Trident cannot be justified morally, financially or economically. That is why its supporters cannot win in Scotland.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. Three remaining hon. Members are seeking to catch my eye, and the Front-Bench winding-up speeches must begin at 9.40 pm. Three colleagues from the same party can, I am sure, be sufficiently collegiate to work it out for themselves.

9.31 pm

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): I regret that the Prime Minister has come to the House today and the first thing that she has tried to force through is a motion to commit this country to spending up to £200 billion over the next few decades on weapons of mass destruction. Where is the leadership? Where is the vision?

I welcome the Prime Minister to her position, and I wish her well over the next few years, but let us put this in the context of a Government who lecture us about fiscal responsibility. When the Prime Minister was asked twice by my right hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) to tell us what the cost of Trident replacement would be, she refused to answer. Every single Conservative Member will march through the Lobby and give a blank cheque to the Government. Do not lecture us about fiscal responsibility; that is fiscal irresponsibility.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Lothian (George Kerevan) asked the Prime Minister if she is prepared to press the button. Her answer was yes. Have we forgotten the lessons of Hiroshima, which my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee West (Chris Law) spoke about? Are we prepared to obliterate humanity? That is the result of pressing the button. We on the SNP Benches are not prepared to put a price on humanity by backing weapons of mass destruction. It is immoral.

We have to face up to the fact that this country's conventional capability has been stripped to the bone. There is currently not a single surface vessel in Scotland, and the UK Navy has 17 frigates and destroyers—that is all. The Falklands, which we fought to defend as we entered the 1980s, does not have a warship stationed by it. We should be investing in conventional defence and taking care of our responsibilities in respect of terrorism, not investing in rusting hulks that will do nothing for humanity and nothing for our defence. In the context of Scotland, we now know that the price of Trident is that the contract for the Type 26 frigates has been put back. Workers in Scotland face redundancy as a consequence of this Government's actions.

I shall conclude, as I want to let colleagues in. Fifty-eight Members from Scotland will be voting against the motion tonight. Scotland is speaking with a very clear voice: we do not want these weapons of mass destruction. Let me say to the House that this will be another nail in the coffin of the Union. If the House rejects what the people of Scotland want, which is the removal of these weapons from our soil, ultimately my country will be independent and free of nuclear weapons.

9.34 pm

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): Time is short and I have little time for a preamble, but these weapons are a useless relic from another time. They are morally obscene, completely useless and utterly unaffordable at a time when the gap between the haves and the have-nots is wider than it has ever been, with the Government hellbent on destroying the welfare system and with thousands relying on food banks. Nothing will convince me that we should have any priority other than changing that horrific experience.

I do not want to live in a country where an already struggling family are told that their house is too big or that the room that gives them space for a wheelchair or

support equipment is a luxury. I do not want to live in a country where we have nothing to offer our children but excuses and craftily worded answers when they see huge companies telling us they have paid their way, when in fact they have hidden accounts all over the world. I do not want this country to accept that families should need to go to a food bank to eat something in the evening when their kids come home from school. No one can say that is fair. No one can say that is acceptable.

In this Parliament—right here, right now—we have a choice: we can stand up and say, “No more. Not in our name.” No more will we stand by while the Government and their supporters, and often even the Opposition, walk the other way and plan to spend our money on something abhorrent, obscene and completely unnecessary in our modern world.

What could we do with £200 billion? That money could bring change. Tonight, the families I mentioned deserve change. They deserve better. They deserve a fairer future. They deserve to eat tonight, to be comforted, to be safe and to feel that they are part of our society and that we care about them. They have the right to opportunity and to an education, as far as they want to take it. They have the right to expect that this country, with all its wealth, status and opportunity, can move beyond insane projections of power and can care for its own to change things for the better.

Our lives, and everything we do, are about change. They are about the future we want, not the future that others are accepting for us. We should start testing ourselves. That should not be about how we build technology that is capable of destruction and death at an indiscriminate and barbaric level. It should be about how we provide for those who have little or nothing—or, to put it another way, it is about bairns, not bombs.

9.36 pm

John Nicolson (East Dunbartonshire) (SNP): There is an absurd illogicality about this country's debate over nuclear weapons. We are debating whether to spend upwards of £150 billion on a weapons system we will never fire because it is entirely redundant. Supporters of Trident would have us impoverish our grandchildren for an arsenal last effective in the 20th century.

Once upon a time, the enemy was clear: it was the Soviet Union. The balance of terror argument was equally clear: if Stalin, Khrushchev, Brezhnev or Gorbachev threatened us with invasion, we had the capacity to murder millions of Warsaw pact citizens. However, those days are long gone. We cannot threaten nuclear annihilation against a Daesh death cult embedded in civilian areas, which is why the Defence Secretary struggled so badly this morning when asked to explain how Trident offered a defence against terrorism.

“But look at Mr Putin,” warn the nuclear apologists. “He might threaten us, and only Trident will stand in his way.” That argument is beyond absurd. Thus far, Putin has brutalised Chechnya, invaded Georgia, annexed part of Crimea and bombarded Syria—all against our will. He has a strategy as old as Russian foreign policy itself, and Britain's nuclear fig leaf does not deter him one jot.

As Lord Bramall, the former Chief of the General Staff, put it, Trident, for

“all practical purposes...has not and...would not deter any of the threats...likely to face this country in the foreseeable or...longer-term future.”—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 24 January 2013; Vol. 742, c. 1229.]

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): The Government motion asks us to vote for a minimum credible nuclear deterrent. Would it not have been better if they had brought forward plans for minimum credible conventional forces, which strike me as much more pertinent?

John Nicolson: It would indeed, because our conventional forces have been starved of cash. We have no conventional ocean-going surface ships based in Scotland, despite frequent Russian intrusions into our waters. We have built aircraft carriers without aircraft to fly off them or the necessary surface ships and submarines for protection. We have complaints from senior armed forces officials about the lack of appropriate equipment for our soldiers on the ground—directly contributing to deaths in Iraq and Afghanistan, as described by Chilcot.

As Michael Clarke, director general of the Royal United Services Institute, puts it:

“The one thing that politicians don't address when they talk about Britain's nuclear weapons is how they do, or don't, actually figure in practical defence policy for the next 10 or 20 years. It is really very depressing.”

We on the SNP Benches choose to defy that stereotype. We want to put logic at the heart of the UK's defence policy. It is what our voters want; it is also what much of the military wants. Major General Sir Patrick Cordingley spells it out for the armchair generals who sit on the Government Benches, telling us that there is no purpose to it.

I appeal to my colleagues on the Labour Benches: vote with us. Follow your conscience; do not vote for a missile system that is the equivalent of a cavalry charge when the machine gun has already been introduced.

9.40 pm

Clive Lewis (Norwich South) (Lab): Let me take this opportunity to welcome the Prime Minister to her role.

It is stating the obvious that opinion has been sharply divided in today's debate, just as it is that that was exactly the Government's intention. As the Chilcot report clearly demonstrated, when we make decisions of war and peace—of life and death—based on political posturing, assumptions and poor evidence, the results can be catastrophic. There are few decisions more important than the future security of our country and weapons that could kill millions, so I, like most Members, want to see a world without them.

The question, then, is how we achieve that while ensuring that we have a defensive capability that is fit and proper for the 21st century. My personal scepticism about the current proposal is based on concerns about military utility, economic cost and benefit, and whether it is part of a genuine multilateral approach. Many of my hon. Friends have pointed to the position agreed by the Labour party conference in making a perfectly reasonable argument for a continuous at-sea submarine-based nuclear capability, though I would add that the policy also acknowledged a multilateral path to ultimate disarmament. Since that conference decision, a review has been instigated. Perhaps more importantly, we must

[Clive Lewis]

take account of other developments, not least Brexit, in holding the Government to account today. The Government could have chosen to address that, and the other concerns that I and others have traditionally had, with clear answers; instead, they chose to divide rather than unite.

Let me be clear that I, for one, do not believe that this is about patriots versus pacifists, or who is moral or immoral. No matter what our differences, we all speak to what we think is best for our constituents and our country. That is certainly true of all Members who have contributed today. Many represent communities with a particular stake in this debate. I applaud, in particular, my hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock), whose tenacity in standing up for his own community's interest is second to none.

We heard a great speech from the hon. Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt), the knowledgeable Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee, who described Trident renewal as a political weapon surplus to the needs of NATO. The hon. Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) quoted Bevin's famous comments about the need for an independent nuclear capability. However, as Labour Members know, Nye Bevan said:

"It is...not a question of who is in favour of the...bomb, but...what is the most effective way of getting the damn thing destroyed."

He too was a multilateralist. Meanwhile, the hon. Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon) invited us to come to his bedroom to see his large weapon—defence establishment at Aldermaston.

Last week I replied to the Secretary of State after his statement concerning the recent NATO summit. I spoke of NATO's values: international co-operation; military force for defence, not aggression; mutualism and the sharing of risk; opposition to tyranny; and the defence of democracy. Those values are deeply held by Labour Members. It is no coincidence that two of NATO's founding Governments were led by the new deal Democrats and the Labour party.

Lisa Nandy (Wigan) (Lab): I do not want to interrupt the thread of my hon. Friend's important argument, but may I bring him to the text of the motion and ask whether he shares my concern about the phrase, "for as long as the global security situation demands"?

We have just had the Chilcot report, which reminded us that we are not safe if we do not uphold international rules and obligations. I, for one, would be very glad to hear from the Defence Secretary, and from my hon. Friend, what concrete steps are going to be taken to uphold our commitment to multilateral disarmament.

Clive Lewis: I will come to that issue later in my speech, but the motion as it stands calls into question the Government's integrity in holding up the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

Whereas the values that underpin NATO's formation are timeless, the decision that the United Kingdom should build and maintain its own nuclear weapon system was a strategic military and political decision made on the basis of specific considerations at the time. Making a similar consideration is the task that falls to this House today. Unfortunately, the Government's timing is wrong and they have fallen short of that objective.

The previous Prime Minister said that today's vote was to "provide certainty", but the Government motion does not do that, because it does not change anything. We simply have no more detail. Every indication is that this is a ploy that the Government repeat at will to avoid discussing critical issues. They then create the very uncertainty that they claim to be addressing. If that is not the case, the Secretary of State can very easily say so. There are no new costings in the motion. It used to be said that the Tories knew the value of nothing but the price of everything, but now they do not even know that. If there are any specific commitments to particular contracts, or if any are provided through today's vote, perhaps the Secretary of State could list them.

The Government's motion also asks us to endorse their record on multilateral disarmament. Many of us in this House are serious about multilateralism as a policy, not a soundbite. What have this Government, as opposed to previous Administrations, actually done to promote multilateral measures since last year's non-proliferation conference failed to reach agreement?

The line between unilateralists and multilateralists is too often exaggerated. Surely if we can agree that our goal is for a world free of nuclear weapons, the question is: how do we get there? International agreement is not impossible. The last Labour Government deserve great credit for their role in the international treaties on cluster munitions and landmines. We therefore ask the Government to show real leadership, focus on our shared goals and give us a vision of how we can achieve them.

The motion also considers Trident renewal in isolation from, rather than in the context of, defence policy as a whole. Only last week we discussed the Chilcot report. He recorded a catalogue of equipment failures and their human cost. I know what it is like to be under enemy fire, needing air support and being told that none is available. Conventional forces remain our first form of deterrence against Russian aggression, and they defended our territory the last time it was invaded, in the form of the Falklands.

We need urgent assurance that spending on our nuclear capability is not made at the expense of conventional military equipment. In the past six years, the MOD has seen its budget suffer a real-terms cut of 9%. The number of attack helicopters has been cut by 21%; frigates and destroyers by 17%; fighter aircraft by 25%; and main battle tanks by 41%. The size of the armed forces has been cut by a fifth, and the MOD civilian workforce by almost a third, while carrier strike and maritime patrol craft have been axed altogether. To maintain one single capability at the expense of losing many others would not strengthen our defence, but weaken it.

Costs are critical. The MOD's equipment plan has been left reeling by last month's Brexit decision. That is not my conclusion, but that of the Joint Committee on National Security Strategy. The implications for the defence budget may be profound, but we have had no clarity from the Prime Minister today. Where is it? Will the Secretary of State please tell us what assurances he has that the defence budget will be maintained in real as well as proportional terms?

Similarly, the motion asks us to, in effect, endorse the Government's defence industrial strategy. Let me be clear that we cannot allow the devastation that happened to industrial communities in the 1980s under Thatcher

happen again. Retaining a workforce with specialist skills is a matter of military as well as economic security. Those points have been made very clearly today by many Opposition Members and by the GMB and Unite trade unions, but neither they nor I endorse the Government's defence procurement policy as a whole.

On current trends, 25p in every defence procurement pound is forecast to go to America by 2020. Given the consequences of Brexit for the exchange rate with the dollar, this urgently needs to be reviewed. Just last week, the Government announced a multimillion-pound purchase of nine P-8As and 50 Apache helicopters from America. When will the Secretary of State share with this House the detail to assure us that the deal will, in fact, secure British jobs in the long term? It is the same story on steel. The Prime Minister's earlier words fell well short of any guarantee about the Successor programme.

The security threats that we face are many and fast changing. There are serious issues worthy of serious consideration. We have heard a range of views from across the House, and rightly so, because this is a complex issue. The biggest shock to our security, for many, has been Brexit. That resulted not from the actions of our enemies, but from the complacency and arrogance of our former Prime Minister and his short-term political game playing.

9.50 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Michael Fallon):

There can be no more important decision for this House to take than the renewal of Britain's independent deterrent. The hon. Member for Dunfermline and West Fife (Douglas Chapman), who is a friend of mine, did this House a disservice by criticising us earlier for groupthink. I have sat through every minute of this debate, and all the speeches, on both sides of the argument, have been powerful and passionate.

I pay tribute particularly to the speech of the hon. Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker), who argued in favour of the motion, but equally to that of the right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy), who argued against it. I will also remember the speech of the hon. Member for Chesterfield (Toby Perkins), which was based on the evidence. He started on the other side of the argument, he listened to the evidence and over the years he has changed his mind. I also pay tribute to the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt). He, too, opposes the position of his Front-Bench team. He said that he was a solo voice, but he is no less worthwhile for that. He made points about technology that I will reply to a little later.

If there was an example of groupthink, it was to be found in the Scottish National party—a party that ignores at least half of Scottish public opinion, and a party that is content to dispense with our deterrent but happy to cower under an American nuclear NATO umbrella.

The decision we are taking tonight is to approve four replacement submarines to serve us through the 2030s, the 2040s and the 2050s. Tonight, we make a judgment for the long term as to what we need as a country to keep our people safe, when we cannot know what nuclear threats may emerge 30 or 40 years from now. We can, in this House, all agree that a world without nuclear weapons would be a better world, but we have

to face facts. The threats we face are growing. There are 17,000 nuclear weapons out there, and the Prime Minister reminded the House today of the nuclear ambitions of North Korea and the increased threat from Russian forces. Nuclear weapons are here, and they are not going to disappear. It is the role of Government to make sure that we can defend ourselves against them.

Defence, the No. 1 duty of Government, starts with deterrence—the principle that the benefits of any attack would be far outweighed by the gravity of its consequences for an aggressor. The point about deterrence, and our nuclear capability, is that it places doubt in the minds of our adversaries, whether they are nuclear states or rogue states, so that they can never be sure how we would retaliate. That is why the deterrent is not redundant. It is being employed every day and every night. We must be realistic about the growing nuclear threats to our country, and we must be equally realistic about the fact that the deterrent is a policy that we cannot now afford to relinquish.

That is why this Government are committed to building four nuclear ballistic missile submarines to replace our ageing Vanguard fleet when it goes out of service in the early 2030s. That commitment was clearly stated in the manifesto on which we were elected to govern, and it will enable us to maintain the unparalleled protection from the most extreme threats that our continuous at-sea nuclear deterrent has afforded this nation, without a moment's pause, for nearly 50 years under successive Conservative and Labour Governments. As the 2013 Trident alternatives review made unequivocally clear, no other system is as capable, resilient or as cost-effective as the Trident-based deterrent. There are no half measures here: a token deterrent would be no deterrent at all.

My hon. Friend the Member for Reigate, speculated that our submarines might somehow become obsolete through new technology, but that is not the case. Submarines are designed to operate in isolation, and it is hard to think of a system less susceptible to cyber-attack or one better protected in the hiding place that is the ocean. Those who query whether our submarines would remain protected against such attacks should consider why the United States, Russia, China and France are now spending tens of billions of pounds renewing their own submarine-based weapons.

Let me turn to the question I was asked about cost. Yes, the Successor submarines are a serious investment. The cost of building the four boats is £31 billion spread over the 35 years of their life, with a £10 billion contingency on top. The in-service costs remain unchanged at, on average, about 6% of the annual defence budget.

Angus Robertson: This is the last opportunity for the Secretary of State. Please will he tell the House before we vote this evening what the total through-life cost of Trident renewal is? What is it?

Michael Fallon: Many Members have been in this debate all day and will have heard me give the cost for building the four submarines and the proportion that the costs will take when the submarines are in service.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh), the hon. Member for Stirling (Steven Paterson) and the right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) asked about the delivery of the Successor programme. It will be managed by a

[Michael Fallon]

new delivery body for the procurement and in-service support of all nuclear submarines. That will ensure that, unlike in previous warship programmes, the submarines are delivered on time and on budget. If they are not, the principal contractors involved will suffer penalties as a result.

Finally, I was asked about disarmament. We certainly want to see a world free of nuclear weapons. We have made significant reductions to our nuclear forces. We have cut our nuclear stockpiles by over half since the end of cold war. I reduced the number of deployed warheads on each of our submarines from 48 to 40 last year, and we are continuing work to reduce our stockpile to no more than 180 warheads by the mid-2020s. We continue to play our part in talks through the non-proliferation treaty, and as has already been said, Britain has been leading the way in trying to get other countries to make progress, collectively, towards disarmament.

In conclusion, our continuous at-sea deterrent may have been born of the cold war, but it is no relic of the past. The cold war itself has been succeeded by a complex environment of emerging threats, rogue states and unpredictable non-state actors, some of whom have nuclear weapons, while others are intent on getting hold of them. Those threats will not disappear because we refuse to look at them. On the contrary, we must confront them head-on. We cannot predict the future, and we should not gamble with the long-term security of our citizens by assuming that no extreme threat will emerge while so many nuclear weapons remain. That is what this Government intend to do by replacing our Vanguard submarines to sustain the deterrent that has protected us successfully for so long.

As we contemplate this fundamental decision, I urge Members across the House to do what successive Governments have done and to do the right thing, not just for today, but for tomorrow, and vote to maintain our nuclear deterrent for as long as security conditions require it.

Question put.

The House divided: Ayes 472, Noes 117.

Division No. 46]

[10 pm

AYES

Afriyie, Adam	Bellingham, Sir Henry
Aldous, Peter	Benn, rh Hilary
Alexander, Heidi	Benyon, Richard
Ali, Rushanara	Beresford, Sir Paul
Allan, Lucy	Berger, Luciana
Allen, Heidi	Berry, Jake
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena	Berry, James
Amess, Sir David	Betts, Mr Clive
Andrew, Stuart	Bingham, Andrew
Ansell, Caroline	Blackman, Bob
Argar, Edward	Blackwood, Nicola
Atkins, Victoria	Blenkinsop, Tom
Austin, Ian	Boles, Nick
Bacon, Mr Richard	Bone, Mr Peter
Bailey, Mr Adrian	Borwick, Victoria
Baker, Mr Steve	Bottomley, Sir Peter
Baldwin, Harriett	Bradley, rh Karen
Baron, Mr John	Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Barron, rh Kevin	Brady, Mr Graham
Barwell, Gavin	Brazier, Mr Julian
Bebb, Guto	Brennan, Kevin
Beckett, rh Margaret	Bridgen, Andrew

Brine, Steve	Duncan, rh Sir Alan
Brokenshire, rh James	Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Bruce, Fiona	Dunne, Mr Philip
Bryant, Chris	Eagle, Ms Angela
Buckland, Robert	Eagle, Maria
Burnham, rh Andy	Elliott, Julie
Burns, Conor	Elliott, Tom
Burns, rh Sir Simon	Ellis, Michael
Burrowes, Mr David	Ellison, Jane
Burt, rh Alistair	Ellman, Mrs Louise
Byrne, rh Liam	Ellwood, Mr Tobias
Cairns, rh Alun	Elphicke, Charlie
Cameron, rh Mr David	Esterson, Bill
Campbell, rh Mr Alan	Eustice, George
Carmichael, Neil	Evans, Graham
Carswell, Mr Douglas	Evans, Mr Nigel
Cartlidge, James	Evennett, rh Mr David
Cash, Sir William	Fabricant, Michael
Caulfield, Maria	Fallon, rh Michael
Chalk, Alex	Farrelly, Paul
Chapman, Jenny	Fernandes, Suella
Chishti, Rehman	Field, rh Frank
Chope, Mr Christopher	Field, rh Mark
Churchill, Jo	Fitzpatrick, Jim
Clark, rh Greg	Fiello, Robert
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth	Fletcher, Colleen
Cleverly, James	Flint, rh Caroline
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey	Foster, Kevin
Coaker, Vernon	Fovargue, Yvonne
Coffey, Ann	Fox, rh Dr Liam
Coffey, Dr Thérèse	Francois, rh Mr Mark
Collins, Damian	Frazer, Lucy
Colville, Oliver	Freeman, George
Cooper, Julie	Freer, Mike
Cooper, Rosie	Fuller, Richard
Cooper, rh Yvette	Furniss, Gill
Costa, Alberto	Fysh, Marcus
Cox, Mr Geoffrey	Gale, Sir Roger
Coyle, Neil	Gapes, Mike
Crabb, rh Stephen	Garnier, rh Sir Edward
Creagh, Mary	Garnier, Mark
Creasy, Stella	Gauke, rh Mr David
Crouch, Tracey	Ghani, Nusrat
Cunningham, Mr Jim	Gibb, Mr Nick
Dakin, Nic	Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
Danczuk, Simon	Glass, Pat
David, Wayne	Glen, John
Davies, Byron	Glindon, Mary
Davies, Chris	Goldsmith, Zac
Davies, David T. C.	Goodwill, Mr Robert
Davies, Geraint	Gove, rh Michael
Davies, Glyn	Graham, Richard
Davies, Dr James	Grant, Mrs Helen
Davies, Mims	Gray, Mr James
Davies, Philip	Grayling, rh Chris
Davis, rh Mr David	Green, Chris
De Piero, Gloria	Green, rh Damian
Dinenage, Caroline	Green, Kate
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan	Greening, rh Justine
Dodds, rh Mr Nigel	Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Donelan, Michelle	Griffiths, Andrew
Dorries, Nadine	Gummer, rh Ben
Double, Steve	Gwynne, Andrew
Doughty, Stephen	Gyimah, Mr Sam
Dowd, Jim	Halfon, rh Robert
Dowd, Peter	Hall, Luke
Dowden, Oliver	Hammond, rh Mr Philip
Drax, Richard	Hammond, Stephen
Dromey, Jack	Hancock, rh Matt
Drummond, Mrs Flick	Hands, rh Greg
Duddridge, James	Hanson, rh Mr David
Dugher, Michael	Harman, rh Ms Harriet

Harper, rh Mr Mark	Leslie, Chris	Opperman, Guy	Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline
Harrington, Richard	Letwin, rh Mr Oliver	Osborne, rh Mr George	Spencer, Mark
Harris, Rebecca	Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma	Owen, Albert	Starmar, Keir
Hart, Simon	Lewis, Brandon	Paisley, Ian	Stephenson, Andrew
Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan	Lewis, rh Dr Julian	Parish, Neil	Stevenson, John
Hayes, Helen	Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian	Patel, rh Priti	Stewart, Bob
Hayes, rh Mr John	Lidington, rh Mr David	Paterson, rh Mr Owen	Stewart, Iain
Hayman, Sue	Lilley, rh Mr Peter	Pawsey, Mark	Stewart, Rory
Heald, Sir Oliver	Lopresti, Jack	Penning, rh Mike	Streeter, Mr Gary
Healey, rh John	Lord, Jonathan	Pennycook, Matthew	Streeting, Wes
Heapey, James	Loughton, Tim	Penrose, John	Stride, Mel
Heaton-Harris, Chris	Lucas, Ian C.	Percy, Andrew	Stuart, rh Ms Gisela
Heaton-Jones, Peter	Lumley, Karen	Perkins, Toby	Stuart, Graham
Henderson, Gordon	Lynch, Holly	Perry, Claire	Sturdy, Julian
Hepburn, Mr Stephen	Mackinlay, Craig	Phillips, Jess	Sunak, Rishi
Herbert, rh Nick	Mackintosh, David	Phillips, Stephen	Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Hillier, Meg	Madders, Justin	Phillipson, Bridget	Swire, rh Mr Hugo
Hinds, Damian	Mahmood, Mr Khalid	Philp, Chris	Syms, Mr Robert
Hoare, Simon	Mahmood, Shabana	Pickles, rh Sir Eric	Tami, Mark
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret	Main, Mrs Anne	Pincher, Christopher	Thomas, Derek
Hollingbery, George	Mak, Mr Alan	Poulter, Dr Daniel	Thomas, Mr Gareth
Hollinrake, Kevin	Malhotra, Seema	Pow, Rebecca	Thomas-Symonds, Nick
Hollobone, Mr Philip	Malthouse, Kit	Powell, Lucy	Thrup, Maggie
Holloway, Mr Adam	Mann, John	Prentis, Victoria	Timms, rh Stephen
Hopkins, Kris	Mann, Scott	Prisk, Mr Mark	Timpson, Edward
Howarth, rh Mr George	Marris, Rob	Pritchard, Mark	Tolhurst, Kelly
Howarth, Sir Gerald	Matheson, Christian	Pursglove, Tom	Tomlinson, Justin
Howell, John	Mathias, Dr Tania	Quin, Jeremy	Tomlinson, Michael
Howlett, Ben	May, rh Mrs Theresa	Quince, Will	Tracey, Craig
Huddleston, Nigel	Maynard, Paul	Redwood, rh John	Tredinnick, David
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy	McCabe, Steve	Reed, Mr Jamie	Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
Hunt, Tristram	McCarthy, Kerry	Reed, Mr Steve	Truss, rh Elizabeth
Huq, Dr Rupa	McCartney, Jason	Rees, Christina	Tugendhat, Tom
Hurd, Mr Nick	McCartney, Karl	Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob	Turley, Anna
Jackson, Mr Stewart	McDonagh, Siobhain	Reeves, Rachel	Turner, Mr Andrew
James, Margot	McFadden, rh Mr Pat	Reynolds, Jonathan	Turner, Karl
Jarvis, Dan	McGinn, Conor	Robertson, Mr Laurence	Twigg, Stephen
Javid, rh Sajid	McGovern, Alison	Robinson, Gavin	Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil	McInnes, Liz	Robinson, Mr Geoffrey	Vaizey, rh Mr Edward
Jenkin, Mr Bernard	McKinnell, Catherine	Robinson, Mary	Vara, Mr Shailesh
Jenkyns, Andrea	McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick	Rosindell, Andrew	Vaz, Valerie
Jenrick, Robert	McPartland, Stephen	Rudd, rh Amber	Vickers, Martin
Johnson, rh Alan	Menzies, Mark	Rutley, David	Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa
Johnson, rh Boris	Mercer, Johnny	Ryan, rh Joan	Walker, Mr Charles
Johnson, Diana	Merriman, Huw	Sandbach, Antoinette	Walker, Mr Robin
Johnson, Gareth	Metcalfe, Stephen	Scully, Paul	Wallace, Mr Ben
Johnson, Joseph	Miliband, rh Edward	Selous, Andrew	Warburton, David
Jones, Andrew	Miller, rh Mrs Maria	Shannon, Jim	Warman, Matt
Jones, rh Mr David	Milling, Amanda	Shapps, rh Grant	Watson, Mr Tom
Jones, Gerald	Mills, Nigel	Sharma, Alok	Wharton, James
Jones, Graham	Milton, rh Anne	Sharma, Mr Virendra	Whately, Helen
Jones, Helen	Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew	Sheerman, Mr Barry	Wheeler, Heather
Jones, Mr Kevan	Moon, Mrs Madeleine	Shelbrooke, Alec	White, Chris
Jones, Mr Marcus	Mordaunt, Penny	Sherriff, Paula	Whittaker, Craig
Jones, Susan Elan	Morden, Jessica	Shuker, Mr Gavin	Whittingdale, rh Mr John
Kane, Mike	Morgan, rh Nicky	Simpson, David	Wiggin, Bill
Kawczynski, Daniel	Morris, Anne Marie	Simpson, rh Mr Keith	Williams, Craig
Kendall, Liz	Morris, David	Skidmore, Chris	Williamson, rh Gavin
Kennedy, Seema	Morris, James	Slaughter, Andy	Wilson, Phil
Kinahan, Danny	Morton, Wendy	Smeeth, Ruth	Wilson, Mr Rob
Kinnock, Stephen	Mowat, David	Smith, Angela	Winterton, rh Dame Rosie
Kirby, Simon	Mundell, rh David	Smith, Chloe	Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Knight, rh Sir Greg	Murray, Mrs Sheryll	Smith, Henry	Wood, Mike
Knight, Julian	Murrison, Dr Andrew	Smith, Julian	Woodcock, John
Kwarteng, Kwasi	Neill, Robert	Smith, Nick	Wragg, William
Kyle, Peter	Newton, Sarah	Smith, Owen	Wright, Mr Iain
Lancaster, Mark	Nokes, Caroline	Smith, Royston	Wright, rh Jeremy
Latham, Pauline	Norman, Jesse	Smyth, Karin	Zahawi, Nadhim
Leadsom, rh Andrea	Nuttall, Mr David	Soames, rh Sir Nicholas	
Lee, Dr Phillip	Offord, Dr Matthew	Solloway, Amanda	Tellers for the Ayes:
Lefroy, Jeremy	Onn, Melanie	Soubry, rh Anna	Stephen Barclay and
Leigh, Sir Edward	Onwurah, Chi	Spellar, rh Mr John	Jackie Doyle-Price

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Lammy, rh Mr David
Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmina	Law, Chris
Allen, Mr Graham	Long Bailey, Rebecca
Arkless, Richard	Lucas, Caroline
Bardell, Hannah	MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan
Black, Mhairi	Maskell, Rachael
Blackford, Ian	Mc Nally, John
Blackman, Kirsty	McCaig, Callum
Blomfield, Paul	McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
Blunt, Crispin	McDonald, Stuart C.
Boswell, Philip	McDonnell, Dr Alasdair
Brake, rh Tom	McDonnell, John
Brock, Deidre	McGarry, Natalie
Brown, Alan	McLaughlin, Anne
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas	Meale, Sir Alan
Burden, Richard	Monaghan, Carol
Burgon, Richard	Monaghan, Dr Paul
Butler, Dawn	Mullin, Roger
Cadbury, Ruth	Murray, Ian
Cameron, Dr Lisa	Nandy, Lisa
Campbell, Mr Ronnie	Newlands, Gavin
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair	Nicolson, John
Champion, Sarah	O'Hara, Brendan
Chapman, Douglas	Osamor, Kate
Cherry, Joanna	Oswald, Kirsten
Clegg, rh Mr Nick	Paterson, Steven
Clwyd, rh Ann	Pound, Stephen
Corbyn, rh Jeremy	Pugh, John
Cowan, Ronnie	Rayner, Angela
Crawley, Angela	Rimmer, Marie
Cryer, John	Ritchie, Ms Margaret
Day, Martyn	Robertson, rh Angus
Docherty-Hughes, Martin	Salmond, rh Alex
Donaldson, Stuart Blair	Saville Roberts, Liz
Durkan, Mark	Shah, Naz
Edwards, Jonathan	Sheppard, Tommy
Farron, Tim	Siddiq, Tulip
Ferrier, Margaret	Skinner, Mr Dennis
Flynn, Paul	Smith, rh Mr Andrew
Foxcroft, Vicky	Smith, Jeff
Gethins, Stephen	Stephens, Chris
Gibson, Patricia	Stevens, Jo
Godsiff, Mr Roger	Stringer, Graham
Goodman, Helen	Thewliss, Alison
Grady, Patrick	Thomson, Michelle
Grant, Peter	Trickett, Jon
Gray, Neil	Vaz, rh Keith
Greenwood, Margaret	Weir, Mike
Griffith, Nia	West, Catherine
Haigh, Louise	Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
Hamilton, Fabian	Whitford, Dr Philippa
Harris, Carolyn	Williams, Hywel
Hendry, Drew	Williams, Mr Mark
Hoey, Kate	Wilson, Corri
Hopkins, Kelvin	Wishart, Pete
Hosie, Stewart	Zeichner, Daniel
Huq, Dr Rupa	
Hussain, Imran	
Kerevan, George	Tellers for the Noes:
Kerr, Calum	Owen Thompson and
Lamb, rh Norman	Marion Fellows

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House supports the Government's assessment in the 2015 National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review that the UK's independent minimum credible nuclear deterrent, based on a Continuous at Sea Deterrence posture, will remain essential to the UK's security today as it has for over 60 years, and for as long as the global security situation

demands, to deter the most extreme threats to the UK's national security and way of life and that of the UK's allies; supports the decision to take the necessary steps required to maintain the current posture by replacing the current Vanguard Class submarines with four Successor submarines; recognises the importance of this programme to the UK's defence industrial base and in supporting thousands of highly skilled engineering jobs; notes that the Government will continue to provide annual reports to Parliament on the programme; recognises that the UK remains committed to reducing its overall nuclear weapon stockpile by the mid-2020s; and supports the Government's commitment to continue work towards a safer and more stable world, pressing for key steps towards multilateral disarmament.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

ENTERPRISE

That the draft Pubs Code etc. Regulations 2016, which were laid before this House on 13 June, be approved.—(*Christopher Pincher.*)

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

That the draft Halton, Knowsley, Liverpool, St Helens, Sefton and Wirral Combined Authority (Election of Mayor) Order 2016, which was laid before this House on 8 June, be approved.—(*Christopher Pincher.*)

Question agreed to.

EUROPEAN SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That Kelvin Hopkins be discharged from the European Scrutiny Committee and Kate Green be added.—(*Bill Wiggin, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*)

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That Valerie Vaz be discharged from the Science and Technology Committee and Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods be added.—(*Bill Wiggin, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*)

WELSH AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That Carolyn Harris be discharged from the Welsh Affairs Committee and Chris Elmore be added.—(*Bill Wiggin, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*)

Mr Speaker: I now ask the Whip to move the motion for the Adjournment.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: The right hon. Gentleman was rather late in rising—I had already started to put the question—but I will let him off on this occasion. He is a callow youth. We will deal with him.

Dr Lewis: I am much obliged to you, Mr Speaker. I wonder whether it is within the rules of order for me to point out that on 14 March 2007, when the “initial gate” vote on Trident took place, the majority was 248, whereas this evening it has risen to 355.

Mr Speaker: Well, some people might think that it was the Lewis effect.

The right hon. Gentleman was not orderly in doing that, but he has done it.

ADJOURNMENT

Resolved, That this House do now adjourn.—
(*Christopher Pincher.*)

10.21 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Monday 18 July 2016

[MARK PRITCHARD *in the Chair*]

Student Loans Agreement

4.30 pm

Mark Pritchard (in the Chair): Given the temperature today, if Members wish to remove their jackets please feel free to do so.

4.31 pm

Helen Jones (Warrington North) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered e-petition 131167 relating to changes to the student loans agreement.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard, this afternoon. It may come as a surprise to some people that we are debating this issue in July 2016, as the decision was taken last autumn, but the reason is very simple: it took students some time to realise what decision the Government had made. Those of us who have been in the House for a while know that whenever the former Chancellor spoke, it was wise not just to listen to what he said, whether that was in the autumn statement or the Budget, but to look at the small print. And so it was last year: buried on page 126 of the Budget papers was the Government's decision to freeze the repayment threshold for student loans at £21,000. Not unreasonably, it took students some time to realise what was happening. That decision was and is a real breach of faith on the Government's part.

This is the second Parliament in succession in which students have been massively let down. Under the coalition, the Liberal Democrats promised to freeze, or in some cases abolish, tuition fees—as usual with the Liberal Democrats, it depended which part of the country people were in—and then the Government trebled them. This time, when the Government introduced the new student loans system, they promised that the threshold for making repayments would be updated from April 2017 in line with average earnings, but then they chose to freeze it until at least April 2021. The worst thing about that decision is that it is retrospective, so that students who took out a loan at the beginning of this process—let us remember that some of them were only 18 when they did so—have found the conditions of that loan changed, without any right of appeal or recourse to any other relief. People have said, quite rightly, that in a commercial organisation that would not be allowed, but it seems that the Government are not prepared to adhere to the standards that they impose on others.

Why have they done it? The late and fairly unlamented Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, which had some claim to being probably the most unskilled Department in Whitehall, said in 2015:

“We consulted on freezing the repayment threshold”.

So it did. The problem was that the responses were overwhelmingly against a freeze: 84% of respondents were against freezing the threshold and only 5% were in favour. When a Government conduct such a consultation,

get a massive thumbs-down and still go ahead, we know that they are on very shaky ground, so we have to dig a little deeper to find out what was really going on. The answer is in another announcement from the Department:

“This increases the financial commitment of borrowers to repaying their loans.”

It added that it expected such a move to generate an extra

“£3.2 billion over the lifetime of the loans”.

There we have it. The Government were not getting enough money in, so they resorted to that rather underhand tactic to get more. There are two simple reasons why they are not getting enough money. First, they have failed to create enough highly skilled jobs in the economy, so many graduates are working in low-paid, low-skilled jobs, often in insecure unemployment, like many other people in the country. In fact, so committed are the Government to the notion of insecurity and low pay in employment that it was possible for them to have a candidate for the leadership of their own party, the right hon. Member for South Northamptonshire (Andrea Leadsom), who wanted to get rid of all restrictions on small firms—that was before she was given the revolver and the bottle of whisky. In 2012, she said:

“I envisage there being absolutely no regulation whatsoever—no minimum wage, no maternity or paternity rights, no unfair dismissal rights, no pension rights—for the smallest companies”.—[*Official Report*, 10 May 2012; Vol. 545, c. 209.]

It is not surprising that the Government have failed to create more skilled jobs. In fact, the Higher Education Statistics Agency pointed out last year that a third of graduates were working in low-skilled jobs six months after they graduated and that more than 16,700 graduates were unemployed. They worked as cleaners, office juniors and road sweepers. I am old enough to remember when graduates and students used to take those jobs in their holidays, or sometimes even in the summer after they had finished studying, while they looked for a permanent job and somewhere to live. We were told at the time that it was character-building for us, and it made us realise how lucky we were. Well, the luck has run out for many of today's graduates. They are not doing those jobs for a few weeks; they are doing them for months, sometimes years, without reaching the level of wages that mean they can pay back their loans. No wonder the system is in chaos.

Secondly, the Government are failing to get this money in because the whole student loan system itself is in chaos. In 2013, the National Audit Office warned BIS that it was in danger of wasting hundreds of millions of pounds because it did not have enough information on the recipients of its loans. In fact, it had no employment information at all for 368,000 people, so it did not know whether they should be paying back or not. The NAO also said that

“BIS...consistently over-forecasts how much it expects to collect annually”.

Presumably, they were too frightened of the right hon. Member for Tatton (Mr Osborne) to tell him the truth.

At the time, the NAO estimated that a third of loans would not be paid back. The Library forecast a £3.2 billion shortfall, in this Parliament alone, between what the Government expected to collect and what they would actually collect. The former Business, Innovation and Skills Committee went further: in 2014, it suggested that almost half the loans would never be repaid.

[Helen Jones]

The Government's own estimate was that 45% would not be repaid. That is perilously close to the 46.8% threshold at which the Government cease to get back as much as they are paying out.

What did the Government do in response? They did not think, "Well, perhaps the economic model we're pursuing isn't quite right." They did not think to end the chaos in the Department. Instead, they sold off a bit of the student loan book—mostly old loans from the '90s—and they used this back-door method of collecting more money, adding another flaw to an already flawed system.

Students are clocking up interest at such a rate that it is almost impossible for them to get a grip on what they owe. While they are university, interest is charged at the rate of the retail prices index plus 3%. One student recently posted online his statement from the Student Loans Company, which showed how much interest he was clocking up, sometimes at the rate of £180 each month. For someone earning under £21,000, interest clocks up at the rate of RPI. For someone earning more than that, it is on a sliding scale, so that when they earn £41,000 they are charged interest at the rate of RPI plus 3%.

Two things about that strike me as very interesting. First, the Government use the measure of RPI, when the rest of the time they tell us that the consumer prices index is the correct measure of inflation. They seem to hold two contradictory positions: when they are paying money out to their citizens—in the form of benefits, for example—they say that CPI is the correct measure of inflation, but when they are collecting money, they say that RPI is the correct measure. Holding two contradictory positions at the same time is what George Orwell called "doublethink". The Government seem to believe in both.

Secondly, by freezing the earnings threshold at £21,000, the Government are ensuring not only that more people are on the wage level at which they start to pay back loans, but that they pay them back with a higher rate of interest. It is a double whammy. Such a piece of chicanery really should not be allowed to go unchallenged. It matters, because it is important that students have faith in the system. Changing that system destroys that faith, particularly among those from the poorest families or those who are the first in their family to go to university.

Let me tell the Minister what it is like to be the first person in a family to go to university—it was like this even under the old grant system. Such a person wants certainty. They calculate to the last penny what they are getting in and what they have to pay out. They want to know that when they leave university, they will get a decent job. That implied promise that if someone went to university, worked hard and got a good degree, they would get a decent job at the end, has now been abandoned.

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): My hon. Friend is absolutely right to choose to introduce the debate on this particular petition. I hope she has more success in getting answers from the Minister than I did in my Adjournment debate on 27 June. She is making a powerful case. According to the Government's own figures, graduates on a salary between £21,000 and £30,000 will have to pay back £6,100, whereas those on a salary of £40,000

will pay only £400 extra. Those on an even higher salary pay even less. The system disproportionately affects people who are worse off, including women and people from ethnic minorities.

Helen Jones: My hon. Friend is right. This system is flawed all the way through. Trying to fix it by making it more flawed is not going to work. Today's students do not have the assurance, which we had in the past, that they will get a decent job. Many graduates are doing low-paid, low-skilled jobs that are perfectly useful but not commensurate with their qualifications. They often move from job to job, with nothing that could be described as a career. The doors of their chosen professions are frequently closed to them because they cannot afford to do the unpaid internships that are currently the way into many jobs.

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on introducing this debate. I declare an interest: I have two sons, both of whom will have to pay loans back at the higher rate, and both of them have paid fees of more than £9,000 a year. My hon. Friend might also have mentioned graduates like my elder son. He has chosen to work abroad for two years, on a low wage, to get an interesting experience of the world. He is not fully aware of the implications for what he is going to have to pay or how the repayment rates are rolling up year after year.

Helen Jones: I am grateful for that intervention. My hon. Friend is right. When students took out loans at the start of university—this was as true under the old system as it is under the new one—many were not really aware of the full implications: when they would have to start to pay them back, how interest accumulates and so on. We would be foolish to expect many of them to be aware of those things at the age of 18. I do not think I or many other Members would have been.

The problems faced by many young graduates are simple. They have little hope of getting into decent jobs and no hope of getting on the housing ladder. Many of them are stuck in rented accommodation, with rents rising every year, meaning that they cannot save for a deposit on a house. Recently released statistics show that this will be the first generation to earn less than the one before. The assumption we always made, certainly when I was growing up, was that each generation would do better than the one before, but that no longer holds good. That is a real betrayal of our young people. What the Government have done with student loans adds to that betrayal. They have failed to understand the implications for young people and to get a grip on the system.

As in so many other matters these days, the Government are making young people pay the price for their failure. The Minister should really think again. With a new Chancellor in place, there is a chance to revisit this matter and get the student loans system on a sensible and sustainable footing. I urge the Minister to take this chance, because what is happening at the moment is totally wrong.

4.47 pm

John Pugh (Southport) (LD): I thank the hon. Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) for moving the motion, although she could have been slightly more

charitable towards the Liberal Democrats. This is a subject on which any Liberal Democrat speaks with some trepidation these days, but I voted against the coalition line on increasing student fees. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] Before that, in 2004, I voted against top-up fees, which Labour promised not to introduce—I do not think the hon. Lady did the same—so the record is mixed, but I can give some testimony on the awful torment the issue has created for the Liberal Democrats. I was party to several very difficult discussions within the party about how we should proceed. In the days of the coalition, those who wanted to increase fees used to put very heavy emphasis on the guarantee that the thresholds would move with inflation and that the £21,000 was a starter, rather than the final word. I suppose it could be argued that that was then and this is now. There are also arguments for keeping the situation as it stands and not making the changes that the current Conservative Government wish to make.

I shall rehearse some of the basic arguments. Every time I voted against either top-up fees or the coalition policy on tuition fees, I predicted, quite wrongly, that those changes would be dreadful for access to university. I have to accept that, empirically, that did not happen, but I was right about one thing: those changes added to student indebtedness every single time. If the Government make the changes they want to make, they will be adding to that indebtedness to the tune of at least £3,000. That is one argument for not making any changes, because young people are certainly indebted enough.

A second argument, which might seem slightly trivial, is that the Government held a consultation on the proposals. Consultations are supposed to be about finding out whether something is a good idea. There were, I think, 489 responses, and 42 organisations responded. Of those who responded, only 5% were in favour, with 84% against. The others were clearly somewhere in between or had mixed feelings. If we have a consultation, then quite clearly there is a purpose behind it. I think the purpose is to find out whether people think something is a good idea, and quite clearly they did not think this was a good idea. The Government then either ignore consultations or pay some heed to them. I think they should pay some heed to them.

There is a second, possibly stronger argument for the Government's point of view—this refers back to the trauma my party went through over tuition fees. A lot of the debate at that time was not about whether it was a good political thing to do, because we could see the inherent dangers in it—in fact, people underestimated them. Part of the argument, particularly in relation to the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, was that the change was absolutely crucial in order to manage the nation's finances, as part of the austerity programme, which was the emergency brake we needed to apply to an economy going downhill fast.

People argued that at the time, but if we look at the statistics and the impact of that particular fiscal change, we can see that it was not half as big or portentous, and the impact of not making it would not have been anything like what we were told at that time, either by the Treasury or by the Secretary of State at the time, Vince Cable. When I look back at that particular decision, I see one that produced very little gain for the public finances, but an awful lot of pain—political pain for my party in particular and, more importantly, pain for all the students who were affected by it.

That is a pretty solid argument. I am sure that the Minister, who is a literate and intelligent man, can work it all out for himself, but if he looks at the political impact of making the change versus the fiscal gain, I think he will see that it was basically not an objective worth pursuing, because part of the rationale for the Government doing so was not that they wished to be faithless towards students, but that the country's circumstances demanded it.

Going on to the country's circumstances, however, if it is the case that, as the former Chancellor told us several times, the country's finances are on an upward trend and that we are in a more buoyant position—I think the former Prime Minister said the other day that the economy had been left in a very strong position—why do we need to do worse things now than we had to do in 2010? I just do not follow the logic of that argument, unless we wish to redistribute income in favour of one group rather than another, and that logic has not been spelled out. The argument is "needs must", but if needs must, why did we agree to one thing in 2010 and then, when the economy is allegedly improving, do something worse later on? That is the second argument disposed of.

The third argument, which I think the hon. Member for Warrington North mentioned, is this business of, "It's a retrospective change". Of course, Martin Lewis and people like that are saying, "This is a form of mis-selling." If a private enterprise had done this, we would regard it as mis-selling and we would all be lobbying for the Government to address the issue. Commercial lenders would simply not be allowed to behave like this.

The Government, and previous Governments, have made a slight case for retrospection. I am aware that, in Treasury circles, retrospective measures have been taken, particularly on tax avoidance and the like—whereby people who set up tax avoidance schemes have subsequently found that they have been outlawed—but on the grounds that the schemes were of such a nature that those involved might reasonably have expected that. The Treasury has taken the view that says: "It looked a rather devious scheme at the time and if it looked devious at the time, then you should have thought it was devious and tried avoiding it, and if you get clobbered later on, well so be it."

What argument could legitimately be put to students? The only coherent argument that could be put is that they ought to be aware that Governments are intrinsically faithless, but that is not really an acceptable defence a Government could pursue for long. We have a big political problem in this country and it was underlined during the Brexit debate. We have a big political divide in the country and a big problem with establishing that there is genuine inter-generational fairness. As the hon. Lady said, we are looking at millennials ending up in worse financial circumstances over time than their parents and previous generations.

What the Government are doing—and a Universities Minister should be bothered about this—is teaching students a hard and very unwelcome lesson, which is: "Don't trust Governments. Any contract with a Government isn't worth the paper it's written on." That is an extremely negative message, which the new Prime Minister and the new Government certainly ought not to be too quick to promote it. They should genuinely and urgently reconsider what they are doing, because,

[John Pugh]

as the hon. Lady said, it will not make a huge difference one way or another now, but it will make a big difference in the message that it sends out to future generations.

Mark Pritchard (in the Chair): I call Paul Blomfield to speak.

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab) *rose*—

Mark Pritchard (in the Chair): Sorry, Mr Streeting. Next time—seniority.

4.54 pm

Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab): Thank you very much, Mr Pritchard: a good choice, but I am sure my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting) will top my contribution.

It is a pleasure to contribute to the debate with you in the Chair, Mr Pritchard. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) on introducing it, in her customary way, so comprehensively and with such passion. I am also pleased to see that the Minister still in his place. I am looking forward to long debates with him in the weeks ahead on the Higher Education and Research Bill, starting tomorrow.

The Minister has drawn a bit of a short straw today, because he has to defend something that is, frankly, pretty indefensible. I am very grateful to all the people who signed the e-petition to ensure that we have this debate today—I think the second highest number were from my constituency. I am also grateful to all those who have written me to share with me the impact this change will have on them—not so much financially, but in the way they feel they have been treated by the Government.

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): I am sure that my hon. Friend will make a fantastic speech. Like him, I represent many thousands of students in my constituency and, again like him, I have received many emails about this subject. Does he agree with me and indeed with my constituents—Tamsin, Elizabeth, Tom and many more—that these plans are dangerous, unfair and frankly outrageous?

Paul Blomfield: My hon. Friend is perhaps making all our speeches redundant: she has summed it up in a sentence. Nevertheless, I will continue.

My hon. Friend makes an important point. Let me cite one of my constituents who has written to me. Rachel Stamper is due to graduate soon from Sheffield Hallam University. She started her degree—a bachelor of arts in early childhood studies—back in 2013. She made careful calculations before she started. She looked at what the Government said—that she would have to pay back on the money she borrowed. Like everybody else, she was told that from April 2017 the £21,000 repayment threshold would start to rise annually with average earnings. She based her decision to go to university on that information, because she thought that she could trust the Government.

Rachel made the calculations about what she could afford on the basis of the trust that she put in the Government. Now, she expects to pay thousands more over the life of her loan, because, given her area of

study, she will graduate with an incredibly socially useful degree, fulfilling a positive and useful role within our society, but she is not necessarily going to be a high earner. As Rachel said to me, this is about more than “just money”:

“A retrospective change will destroy any trust I, and future generations, have in the student finance system, and perhaps even more widely, in the political system as a whole.”

This proposal was part of a double whammy announced by the then Chancellor after the election last July. As Osbornomics seems to have been rejected by the new Prime Minister, perhaps we now have a little bit of wriggle room to examine some of its more toxic components. This change is clearly one of them, because the first part of that double whammy was the abolition of maintenance grants, which in many ways overshadowed the decision we are talking about today. Nevertheless, the change in the threshold is important because it will have a genuine impact on graduates.

Why are we here today? Why are the Government proposing this change? My hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North made the point very well. Going back to 2012, the year before the system came in, many of us argued that the proposed new system was not only unfair, but that it had not been properly thought through—there was a back-of-an-envelope calculation of what the cost would be. In particular, we talked about the cost of unrepayable debt—the so-called resource accounting and budgeting, or RAB, charge. I remember the Universities Minister at the time, for whom I had a high regard, arguing on the Floor of the House and in the Select Committee on Education, on the number of occasions we scrutinised him about it, that he was confident that the RAB charge would settle at around 28%. As the conversation went forward over the years, he talked about 30% and then the upper 30s. Then it was 40% and finally, in our last exchange in the Select Committee, he said that the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills was modelling it at more than 50%, at which point the new system was clearly costing us more than the old system, on top of being unfair.

Something had to give, and it was clear before the last general election that something was going to give. I asked Ministers on the Floor of the House for assurances that they would not make students pay for the Government’s own mistakes by changing the terms of the system. I was told, in this great language that people use before elections, that there were no plans to do so. Well, no sooner were the votes counted than the plans were rolled out.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): I have no doubt that the hon. Gentleman would have studiously examined, as we all did, all the election manifestos at the time. He will be aware that there was no mention whatsoever of the change in the Conservative manifesto, yet it was imposed within a few months of the party coming to power.

Paul Blomfield: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point, which goes back to the issue of trust that is at the heart of today’s debate. We pushed the Government on the matter in the previous Parliament and there was no indication that the change was going to happen. We looked at the manifesto, and there was no indication there either. As soon as the election was out of the way,

it happened: graduates being forced to pay for the Government's mistakes. As the hon. Member for Southport (John Pugh) said, there was a consultation on the change. People think, "A consultation—presumably that is because the Government want to listen," which is not an unreasonable starting point. Some 84% of the respondents said, "This is a bad idea." What is the Government's response? "Great stuff. We'll go ahead."

We face a system in which not only are those who did not expect it being asked to pay more, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz) pointed out, those who will earn the least will be hit the hardest. The Government's equality impact assessment said:

"In terms of lifetime earnings, our analysis shows the greatest financial impact will be concentrated on those with around median lifetime earnings (between £20,000 and £35,000)".

The figures are clear—the Government's own figures. A graduate earning between £21,000 and £36,000 will pay an extra £6,100. By contrast, those earning more than £40,000 will pay an extra £400 and those earning more than £50,000, an extra £200.

A recent Sutton Trust report shows that although the overall average extra repayment will be £2,800—on the trust's numbers—the gender pay gap means that women graduates will be disproportionately affected. Black students will also be disproportionately affected. The Higher Education Statistics Agency destination of leavers data show that, although the variance in non-black graduates' salaries is larger than that for black graduates, there is more of a bunching effect for the latter, between £20,000 and £30,000, which is the salary range that will be most affected by the proposed changes. All those discriminatory impacts conflict with the Government's stated objectives of widening participation in higher education and of trying to get those who are not traditional participants engaged more fully. All that mess is because of the Government's initial mistakes in introducing the 2010 system.

I represent more than 36,000 students, more than any other Member of Parliament. Thousands graduate from the two universities in my Sheffield constituency. Because of this measure, Sheffield graduates are being made to pay for the Government's mistakes, with the terms of the deal being changed long after they signed up to it. If a second-hand car salesman tried, years later, to get a customer to pay more than the contracted deal, he would be referred to trading standards. With a bank, there would be action by the Financial Conduct Authority. Why should the Government be subject to different standards? This is fraudulent behaviour. It undermines trust in the Government and confidence in the student loan system. I urge the Minister to think again.

5.4 pm

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard, and to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield), who gave an excellent speech, save for the reference to used-car salesmen. I have to declare an interest: my dad is a used-car salesman and he would never find himself in front of trading standards in the way described. We have heard some excellent speeches, particularly from my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) and from one of the

Liberal Democrat Members, the hon. Member for Southport (John Pugh). He honoured his pledge, for which he deserves credit.

I also want to focus my speech on the issue of trust. I confess to having something of an axe to grind. I have been a consistent opponent of the tuition fees system introduced by the Labour Government in 1998, the system that was introduced by the Labour Government in the Higher Education Act 2004 and the coalition reforms in 2010 and 2011. It is true that, in all those cases, I did not think that the right direction—an equitable or sustainable direction—for the funding of higher education had been set out, but I do not want to rehearse those arguments. This afternoon, the debate is more about the promises that were made and the trust that students and their parents, teachers and advisers can have in the Government and in the system overall.

In 2011, I was asked by Martin Lewis—who I am delighted to see in the Public Gallery—the founder of moneysavingexpert.com and a trusted consumer champion—

Mark Pritchard (in the Chair): Order. Forgive me but I have to do this. It is not appropriate, or allowed under the rules, to refer to people in the Public Gallery, however well meaning the reference. I feel uncomfortable saying that, but I have to obey the rules and I know that the hon. Gentleman would want me to highlight them.

Wes Streeting: I am grateful to you, Mr Pritchard. That shows that, even after a year in this place we new Members are still learning.

Martin Lewis was asked by the Minister at the time—now Lord Willetts—to lead an independent taskforce on student finance information. Martin asked me to work with him as his deputy in that endeavour—partly because I had recently finished my term as president of the National Union of Students—to reinforce the fact that, although we were opponents for different reasons and to varying degrees of the reforms that had been put through, we had a shared belief that whatever the merits of the coalition Government's higher education funding reforms it would be an absolute catastrophe if students were deterred, or their parents or advisers dissuaded them, from going into higher education not because of the substance of the package but because of a misunderstanding of it. We were not going out there to sell the reforms on the basis of their politics or their merits; we were simply going out there to argue the facts and to ensure that people could take an informed view.

I do not regret taking that position, because it is crucial that people who are making decisions about their future, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds who sometimes do not have access to the information, advice and guidance that people from wealthier or privately educated backgrounds have, are able to make those decisions based on the facts. We toured schools and speaker events and produced a range of materials. We did our best to empower advisers to give young people making decisions about their future the tools they needed, and we did it in good faith. I have to ask the Minister: how on earth does he think it could be justifiable for people who have signed up to a higher education student finance package to see the terms and conditions changed, either during their course or after they have graduated? That is not only unfair;

[*Wes Streeting*]

it entirely undermines confidence in the Government, as teachers, grandparents, parents and students are out there looking at the information and making decisions.

Last week, I was at Caterham High School in my constituency talking to sixth-formers, and among the questions I was asked were: will the student finance system change for me? Will the repayment conditions change? Will the level of grants or loans change? I am afraid to say that I had to give the honest answer, which is, “I don’t know and I can’t give you that guarantee because of the way in which the Government are behaving”.

For the integrity of the system and for people, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, to be able to make informed choices, the Government have to provide certainty and assurance that the system will not change further down the track. Other Members have rightly pointed out that, if the Government were a private company, we would be absolutely appalled if they were behaving in this way.

The Government may argue that under the small print of legislation it is entirely possible and permissible for Ministers to change the terms and conditions for existing students and graduates, but if a company behaved in such a way, the Financial Conduct Authority would not just be looking at the small print of the terms and conditions; it would also be looking at the marketing material, the sales material and the pitch made by every higher education institution, by the Government, by third-party advisers and by the Independent Taskforce on Student Finance Information. If the FCA came in front of my Committee, it would find it hard to justify a ruling, on the basis of the information and the marketing material that have been distributed, that it was ethically right for a lender to behave in the way the Government are proposing to behave. On that basis, the Government have to think again.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central rightly argued, a change in Government and personnel provides an opportunity to look at the issue with a fresh pair of eyes. The Prime Minister would be congratulated by all parts of the House if she came forward and argued that trust and faith, not just in the student finance system, but in politics itself, were more important than any money saved through the initiative the Government propose. The Government could look to save money in the system through more equitable ways that would lead to higher-earning graduates paying more over the course of their careers than those on middle or lower incomes. I suspect that that is a debate for the passage of the Higher Education and Research Bill.

The Government need to think again on the merits of the arguments that were put forward. They also need to reflect that this issue is of interest not just to students, but to their parents, grandparents, teachers and advisers. Given the damage done under successive Governments to trust in politics—not only on other issues, but on this issue of student finance in particular—I urge the Minister to give this a serious rethink and come forward with alternative proposals that do not lead to Governments changing the terms and conditions for existing students and graduates. If he is not prepared to do that voluntarily, I suspect I will not be the only Member tabling amendments to the Higher Education and Research Bill, so that we

can continue this debate and, I hope, gain support from all parts of the House for the Government to act in a different way.

5.12 pm

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) for securing and leading the debate on this very important issue and for her work chairing the Petitions Committee. I also thank the 130,000 signatories who have highlighted to Parliament their dissatisfaction and concern about the changes to the student loan repayment structure. Many of those signatories come from areas that have Tory MPs. One could be forgiven for not realising that, given the attendance from Tory MPs in this debate, which I am pleased to note has recently increased by 200% from a grand total of none.

Since becoming an elected Member of this House, I have seen the Conservatives continually attacking workers’ rights and the healthcare system and freezing public sector wages. We have witnessed unequal cuts to welfare and local councils, as well as a substantial reduction in front-line police officers and firefighters, but no single group in society has been given as unfair a deal as our students. They have seen an unfair deal at every turn. There has been the loss of the education maintenance allowance, which gave people from the poorest backgrounds £30 a week. That might seem a small amount to some, but it gave 12,000 young people their only chance to go on to further education. Many of them went on to university. The coalition Government cut that allowance, and that affected my constituents in Heywood and Middleton. They found that they could no longer afford the bus fares to attend Hopwood Hall, a further education college in my constituency.

State sixth forms have lost a third of their funding, as it has not been ring-fenced from cuts. Mental health services have been overlooked and hugely underfunded. Youth support and advice services have been lost. There are also the changes to voter registration, the lowest rate of house building since the 1920s, the alteration of student nurses bursaries, which have been turned into loans, and the astronomical increase in tuition fees from £3,000 a year to £9,000 a year. In her role as Home Secretary, the new Prime Minister wrongly deported 48,000 international students, and that was before we voted for Brexit.

Students are clearly receiving the worst dealt hand of the lot. The retrospective changes to the student loan repayment system are unacceptable, unjust and underhand. As many Members and hon. Friends have pointed out, if the Government were a registered commercial company and made retrospective changes to their loan terms, the regulator would not permit the process. We are now the regulator in this House and we should not permit the process. We cannot and should not play politics with people’s education.

The average increase in loan repayments will be just under £2,000 across all graduates. As has been mentioned, those from the poorest 30% of households will repay an average of around £3,000 more under the new rules. Freezing the repayment threshold has a proportionately larger impact on repayments by graduates with lower lifetime earnings. All that equates to 2 million graduates

who will end up paying £306 more each year by 2020-21 by comparison with 2016-17. The average student leaving university will have a debt of £44,000 before even acquiring his or her first job.

When the introduction of the tuition fees hike to £9,000 was announced in 2010, the former Prime Minister and the former Chancellor of the Exchequer said that students would only start paying the money back at a graduate's salary, proclaiming that was "fairer" and "progressive" and "helped social mobility". In 2015, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills looked at the current proposal and concluded that it would have a disproportionate impact on women, disabled students and students from the most disadvantaged backgrounds. The National Union of Students calculated that students previously eligible for maintenance grants who took out their full loan entitlement on a three-year course would graduate with debts worth more than £50,000. That is not progressive; it is not fairer and it certainly does not help social mobility.

The change will not only affect students; it will also have a significant effect on the taxpayer. The Office for Budget Responsibility estimated that, in 2046, when the first set of graduates on £9,000-a-year fees can have their debts cancelled, £11.6 billion will be scrapped. That will increase to £19.9 billion only two years later. In total, 73% of graduates are now expected to never fully pay off their debt, by comparison with 32% under the old system. Figures from the Royal College of Nursing show that it would take 247 years to repay a NHS loan on a staff nurse's salary. I know that life expectancy is increasing, but I had not realised that the Government expect it to be on that scale.

In their last two manifestos, the Government have said, "We should live within our means," and, "We shouldn't pass on levels of debt for future generations to pay," yet we have seen the debt double to £1.7 trillion since 2010. We have now lost our triple A credit rating, all while burdening younger generations with £44,000-worth of debt before they even get on the job and housing ladder. That is unsustainable and unattainable.

It is now clear that it is the Conservatives who have been reckless and maxed out the nation's credit card, and it is our children who will be footing the bill. I believe that an investment in knowledge pays the best interest. I hope that the Government will rethink this regressive policy, which is at the heart of all that is underhand, unscrupulous and unfair. If they do not, it will be seen as an act of betrayal for a generation. It is not just a financial and legal issue; most importantly, it is a moral issue.

5.19 pm

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): I thank the Petitions Committee and my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) for scheduling this important debate. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship once again, Mr Pritchard. I am glad to have the opportunity to speak about an issue that will affect many young people in university cities such as my constituency of Cambridge, where more than 700 petitioned me on this issue.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North said, the issue is not new. In fact, I raised it at Prime Minister's Question Time in December last year, which

seems a lifetime ago. At the time—it is extraordinary—the right hon. Member for Witney (Mr Cameron) was otherwise engaged touring Europe and negotiating his deal; it seems such a long time ago. In his absence, the then Chancellor answered. I had asked:

"When the Chancellor tripled student tuition fees, he set the repayment threshold at £21,000. He has now frozen the threshold, and the Institute for Fiscal Studies tells us that many students will bear many extra thousands of pounds in repayments. Given that he has broken his promise, will he send students an apology or just the bill?"—[*Official Report*, 9 December 2015; Vol. 603, c. 989.]

Unsurprisingly, he did not apologise, and students, I fear, are now left with the bill. What he is left with is rather less clear, but he has obviously got more time on his hands.

Changing the threshold at which student loans are to be repaid, as other Members have pointed out, really does not do politics any good. As all of us here know, one of the major challenges facing us is to slowly rebuild, piece by piece, the trust that has been lost in politics. We need to repair the connection between voter and elected representative, and moving the goalposts really does not help. It is clear that current and prospective students are angry, and I cannot blame them. They are being pulled out of the European Union when the majority of them wanted to remain. They are now being denied opportunities and experiences across the continent that just a month ago seemed boundless. Back in 2010 they were misled and tuition fees tripled under the Liberal Democrats and Conservatives. In many university cities like mine, they are being locked out of the housing market, and in many cases locked out of the rental market, with the cost of living constantly rising. The Government have gambled their future away on an exceptionally bad hand. To top it all, young people are being shafted by the Government on student loan agreements. How can we expect them to put any trust in us when this is how they are treated?

As other Members have pointed out, the Government are keen to remind us that there was a consultation, and when 84% responses came back saying, "Don't do it," it was ignored. Of 489 responses, 410 were explicitly against keeping the threshold of £21,000 the same for all post-2012 borrowers until April 2021. As others have said, the Government—and local councils, too—lose all authority if they consult the public having already made up their mind what they are going to do. The consultation seems as if it was a charade. In fact, it was a sham, which is a shame, because the respondents' points were worth listening to. Their main arguments, some of which have been rehearsed, were against freezing the repayment threshold for five years for all existing and new loans. They argued that the policy represents a retrospective change to borrowers' terms and conditions which, as others have said, would not be allowed to commercial lenders, and that leads to a further loss of trust.

Such loss of trust occurs on a number of levels. The policy goes back on the original deal made between the Government and each student, saddling them with more debt than they signed up for and undermining the fundamental fairness that a contract should entail. It completely disregards the views of those consulting on the policy, including student unions and higher education providers—perhaps they are a part of the group of experts the world no longer believes in. Those most

[Daniel Zeichner]

directly affected are the ones who know what the policy will do. It was snuck in through the back door. It was omitted from the now ex-Chancellor's spending review speech, and it was introduced furtively and somewhat undemocratically through secondary legislation.

The effects are severe, as we have heard. The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills said in its post-consultation report:

"In 2020-21 borrowers will be paying £6 per week, or £306 in the year, more than they will be in 2016-17."

The Institute for Fiscal Studies has found that freezing the repayment threshold has a proportionately larger impact on repayments by graduates with lower lifetime earnings. It also estimates that a five-year threshold freeze would increase average repayments by almost £4,000, and that it expects middle-income earners to be hardest hit by the threshold freeze. The Government's own equality analysis agreed. It concluded that the largest increase in lifetime repayments in absolute terms is among middle earners, and the largest increase as a proportion of earnings is among lower earners. The analysis also concluded that the average increase in repayments would be greater for women than for men.

A constituent wrote to me:

"It breaks my heart to see my family saddled with huge debts that will certainly affect their life chances."

It is imperative that we do not underestimate the impact that an unexpected loss of several thousand extra pounds could have on middle and lower earners struggling to get by. We must look at the changes in a wider context. They come alongside the scrapping of student grants and their replacement with loans, a policy change that the IFS estimates will most affect graduates from lower-income families who go on to become higher earners. Just as we have seen with the Government's damaging pay to stay housing proposals, the policy effectively penalises social mobility and aspiration. It creates extra barriers for successful graduates from low-income backgrounds, but has little impact on students from the richest households.

I was fascinated to discover that the new Prime Minister said in 1997—we have all said things in the past—that she had a real concern that

"to abolish the maintenance grant and replace it with loans will, far from widening access, narrow it."—[*Official Report*, 4 November 1997; Vol. 300, c. 155.]

I wonder whether she will, some years later, revisit her predecessor's schemes.

Freezing the student repayment threshold also comes alongside changes to tuition fees expected in the Higher Education and Research Bill, which I am sure we will discuss in the days ahead. The Bill will allow some universities to charge tuition fees that rise in line with inflation, creating a greater hierarchy of education, with some simply costing more. As the University and College Union points out, further increasing the cost of higher education to the individual is hardly conducive to widening participation.

The UCU also identifies further potential retrospective changes: many students could begin their courses without knowing the full cost of their study, which could change

if the institutional rating changes. All that comes at a time of great instability in the sector. The Universities Minister recently said:

"This Government have done more than any other to put the financing of higher education on to a secure and sustainable footing."—[*Official Report*, 27 June 2016; Vol. 612, c. 125.]

Others may see it slightly differently, especially as that was said a few days after the EU referendum, the shockwaves of which are resonating around our universities and research sector. It may be one of the most destabilising events that our higher education sector has experienced in many, many years.

The Government's original justification for implementing a repayment threshold freeze was that it was necessary to contribute towards debt reduction and to balance the books. As others have said, the rule book seems to have changed. The budget surplus target has been abandoned. Higher education policy has been carved away from one Department and bolted on to another. The Prime Minister said:

"When it comes to opportunity, we won't entrench the advantages of the fortunate few. We will do everything we can to help anybody, whatever your background, to go as far as your talents will take you."

Hear, hear to that; let us hold her to that.

Change is afoot, so I hope the Minister can confirm that students will no longer be treated in such a shabby way, but will be treated better. We are already standing amid the broken pieces of the big society and the wreckage of BIS and our place in Europe. Please do not add to that wreckage. Do not break your promises to all those students who trusted you to keep them.

Mark Pritchard (in the Chair): I shall call the Front-Bench spokesmen and women in a moment. We have a little time today. Typically, Front-Bench spokespersons speak for 10 minutes. However, we have a little extra time if required.

5.28 pm

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): You obviously do not know me if you are telling me I have additional time, Mr Pritchard. It is always a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship and a pleasure to serve under one of the jackets-off brigade of Chairs. I thank you for that.

I am pleased to be able to contribute to this debate, although if this issue ever finds its way to a specific vote in the Chamber of the House of Commons, I will probably not be allowed to vote on it, thanks to the delights of English votes for English laws, which assumes that nobody in my constituency is affected by the changes or even cares about them. My email in-tray suggests that my constituents are affected and do care.

For me, there are two principal arguments against what the Government have done. First, and most obviously, it is the wrong thing to do. It discourages students, especially those who are less well off, those from ethnic minorities and those who are disabled—the very people who have lost out on university education opportunities in the past—from fulfilling their full academic and professional potential.

Secondly, it is wrong because of the way in which the Government did it. They used a Commons majority to force through changes within a few months of an election.

I should correct hon. Members who said that the proposal was not mentioned in the manifesto; it was, but it was written in such a way—it talked about maintaining improvements and progress made in 2010—that anybody reading that brief mention would think that it was an undertaking to abide by the promise made in 2010. It certainly was not an undertaking to throw that promise out of the window. The way the Government did it was wrong. The fact that they held a consultation, then ignored the views of 84% of respondents means that the entire consultation was a complete and utter waste of money. We have to wonder whether it was carried out just to create a veneer of respectability.

Some people would advance a third argument about the legality of the whole thing. I am not going to get into that argument because I am not a lawyer. For me, this is not about whether it is legal or illegal. It is wrong—end of story. Even if it is ever proven to be completely within the law, it is still wrong; that is why it should be changed. It is wrong because it stands in the way of us moving towards the kind of society that I and all Opposition Members want to see. If we believe the new Prime Minister, it is the kind of society that she wants to see, too.

The Government's equalities assessment, which is cited in the House of Commons Library briefing, and which some Members have referred to, states that the average increase in repayments is likely to be greater among women than among men. Although the findings about the impact on people with disabilities and those from ethnic minority groups are not clear, there is a high likelihood that, because of their income range, they will have to pay proportionately more. This is not a step towards creating a society in which women, people with disabilities and people from ethnic minorities are finally able to make up for the disadvantages that they have had to bear for far too many generations. The Government can hide behind a fig leaf, as they did in the analysis by saying that the impacts are small, very small or relatively small, but a backwards step is a backwards step, regardless of how small it is. The fact that the Government made the change in the full knowledge, from their own research, that it is a backward step has to make us wonder how committed they really are, whether under the previous or the new Prime Minister, to opening up access to university education for all.

I believe that it is not work per se but education that helps people to deal with poverty. We can see perfectly well that more people are working, yet more are in poverty. The reason why so many people are in poverty is that they are working in low-paid and insecure jobs. The way to deal with that in the longer term is to increase the standards of education and the opportunities for education that are available to each and every person. Education should be limited only by a person's ability to learn and willingness to work, not by their ability to pay, their parents' ability to pay or, in some cases, their children's ability to pay—that is how long the loans are going to continue.

All this is in marked contrast with what is happening under the Scottish Government. I want to talk about that briefly, because it demonstrates that the changes are not being made of necessity; they are a choice. In Scotland, we have a deeply held belief that education is for everybody, and that it should be a way of reducing inequalities, rather than perpetuating or even increasing

them. While the Tories, with some support—with the honourable exception of the hon. Member for Southport (John Pugh)—trebled tuition fees in England, the Scottish National party Government in Scotland continued to protect our 120,000-plus undergraduates from having to pay tuition fees. The Scottish Government continue to fund the education maintenance allowance scheme, which helps 132,000 young people from poorer families to continue their school and college education. The Conservative Government down here have abolished that scheme.

We do not see financial support to students as a giveaway. It is obscene that the Government talk about the notional £100,000 of additional earnings that graduates can expect to earn over their lifetime. If graduates earn that much more because they are graduates, they will pay it back through their income tax anyway. That is how high earners should be taxed. They should not be taxed additionally because they happened to have attended university. I have never ever met a nurse, a teacher or a social worker who enrolled as a student of those professions to get rich. I have never known a student nurse, a student teacher or a student social worker who could tell me on the day they matriculated or the day they graduated how much they expected to be paid over their lifetime. That is simply not what brings people into those vital and all-too-often undervalued professions. Let us stop saying that these changes are minor because they do not make much difference to people's long-term, lifetime earnings. They are enough to deter people who are scared of the idea of leaving university with a student loan debt that is two or three times as much as their first annual pay packet is likely to be.

Members may not be aware that the Scottish Government continue to provide bursaries for nurses and midwives because we accept the need to train highly qualified nurses and midwives to run the health service in future. We continue to give non-repayable bursaries of £6,578 per year, with additional support if the student nurse or midwife has childcare responsibilities, for example. By comparison, the UK Government seem more interested in making sure every newly qualified nurse or doctor comes out of university with terrifying levels of debt. They should now expect to have unfair employment conditions imposed on them at any time on the Secretary of State's whim without proper negotiation or consultation. The Government may think that bringing in immigrant workers will plug the desperate skills shortage in the health service, but they are closing the door to prevent those desperately needed workers from coming into the country. The Government then wonder why people do not have any confidence in them to run the health service or any other public service.

Even before these changes began to bite—figures were cited earlier, but these are the most up-to-date ones I was able to find—the average student loan debt for a new graduate in England was £24,540. In Scotland, it was just a shade over £10,500. That is the difference that can be made to a new graduate's starting position if we have a Government who believe in investing in higher education and supporting students at a time when they should be concentrating on their studies, not worrying about their bank balance.

I cited those figures to demonstrate that the Government's claim that they cannot afford a fairer system of student support is nonsense. It is perfectly affordable if they

[Peter Grant]

make it a priority. The Scottish Government think it is important and are prepared to make difficult decisions elsewhere to invest in education, not simply because of the benefits to the people who are educated, but because of the immense and immeasurable benefits that those people bring to our society by working in our health service, our schools, our public services and our private industries to boost the economy and generate wealth that we can all share in.

At 10 o'clock tonight, almost everybody in this Parliament who says that we cannot afford to treat our students fairly—not many of them are represented here—will vote to spend £200 thousand million on something whose only possible purpose is to commit a crime on an unimaginable scale. That is where our priorities are just now. If anybody watching this debate thinks it has been one-sided—I have done a rough calculation, and about 85% of people have spoken against what the Government have done—that is how one-sided the Government's consultation was: 84% were against the Government. It is no surprise that the Minister is here on his own, and that none of his pals want to speak in defence of the policy. A couple have come along, but none wanted to speak. The imbalance in this debate is an indication of the depth of feeling across society as a whole against what the Government have done. It is not too late for the Government to change, and I hope they will do so very quickly.

5.38 pm

Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. I welcome the Minister to his place. This is the first time I have debated with him. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) for securing this debate. She is absolutely right to say that students have once again been let down by this Government.

This has been an excellent discussion. I want to reiterate the points made by my hon. Friends the Members for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield) and for Ilford North (Wes Streeting), who outlined the issue of trust. They demonstrated how unfair this retrospective change is and spoke about its long-term impact on trust in the Government. Before the general election, my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central asked about this specific issue. Despite there being no indication before the votes were cast in the general election, no indication in the House and no indication in the Conservative party manifesto, the change has happened. That is outrageous, as he pointed out. I agree with him that a retrospective change will destroy any faith that students have in the political system. I urge the Minister to think about that carefully.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) asked the Prime Minister a question, and demanded an apology, and not just a bill, on behalf of many thousands of his constituents. Unfortunately, the cost of this disastrous Government has fallen upon our students and the next generation.

The issue of trust goes to the heart of the debate. As my hon. Friends have exposed, time and again the Government have offered grand rhetoric on improving access to higher education and social mobility, but time

and again they have failed to deliver. Indeed, they have made matters worse, especially if we take into account the Higher Education and Research Bill, which is having its Second Reading tomorrow, and its potential to increase tuition fees.

I associate myself with the words of the hon. Member for Southport (John Pugh). I commend him for his commitment to education, both inside the House in his work as a Member of Parliament and before coming to this place as a teacher and school leader. He clearly demonstrates a huge amount of knowledge and has great respect in the field.

Every time the Government legislate on higher education, we know that it will mean cuts to the services that mature students and those from low-income backgrounds need and an increased debt burden on our students and that it will make it more difficult for those from low-income backgrounds to attend the top universities. That takes place in the context of spending on adult skills falling in real terms by 41% in the previous Parliament, and funding for post-16 education falling by nearly 16%, the deepest cuts that post-16 education has ever seen.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes) pointed out, in higher education, the Government, not content with tripling tuition fees, scrapped maintenance grants for the poorest students, meaning that they will graduate with more and more debt. That change, justified as a means to cut the national debt, will fail even the test that the Government have set themselves—the Institute for Fiscal Studies has shown that, for each cohort of graduates, the measure will save the Government only 3% of their contribution to students' higher education.

Who will pay the price for the Government's penny pinching from the HE budget? As my hon. Friend said, it will be those students who come from poor backgrounds who go on to earn high salaries. Having needed maintenance loans to get through university, they will face a far higher debt burden than their well-off peers, and will spend more and longer paying off the debt that the Government have lumbered them with. She is right to say that the changes are unacceptable, unjust and underhanded, and that the Conservatives have maxed out the nation's credit card and it is our children who will be footing the bill.

That is the substance of the issue before us today: the Government's decision to freeze the repayment threshold on student loans. The decision announced in last year's autumn statement to freeze the threshold retrospectively is only the latest in a long line of attacks on access to education and social mobility. My hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool South (Mr Marsden) was right when he said that the change amounts to "mis-selling" of loans to students since 2012. He was right to say that it

"will be a disincentive to future loan applicants, in further education as well as higher education".

Students will now feel that they are writing a blank cheque to the Government, whom they have no reason at all to trust. Will the Minister at least have the decency to tell us why any student should ever trust his Government again? I cannot put it any better than my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood), who described the change as dangerous, unfair and outrageous.

The Government, when they trebled the cost of tuition for students, said that students had at least been given a more generous income allowance before having to start paying back their loans. However, even that small consolation will now cease to be true. The IFS has shown that, after five years of the freeze, the repayment threshold will, in real terms, be the same as it was before fees were trebled. The Government promised investment and gave nothing but more debt. Again, it will be middle earners and those from disadvantaged backgrounds who will suffer the most.

The IFS has shown that the average student, as many Members have pointed out, will lose £6,000 as a result of the change. That is outrageous and indefensible. Hard-working students and socially mobile graduates from low-income backgrounds, the very people we should be giving every encouragement and opportunity to pursue higher education, are the very people the Government seem most determined to put off.

The Government's own consultation said that women, black and minority ethnic students, those with disabilities, and mature students will be disproportionately affected by the change. As my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz) outlined today and in her Adjournment debate last month, many groups who have historically not had access to higher education are set to face a £6,000 disincentive. When the Government talk about widening access to education, they must tell us who exactly they are trying to help.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North pointed out, no private company would get away with retrospectively changing the terms of a deal, as the Government have done. Perhaps the Minister can at least tell us their justification for doing so. Given that it will be several years before the Exchequer makes any substantial gains from the policy, can the Minister tell us how much money it will be likely to save in future? That is based on the fact that, for the first several years under the changed scheme, there will be little difference between £21,000 as it was in 2012 and what it was in real terms.

Why are the Government pursuing a policy that will heavily penalise those who come from disadvantaged backgrounds, go to university and then become high earners? Given that the Government's own consultation document has shown that it will be women, BME students and those with disabilities who will lose the most as a result of the policy, why have the Government still failed to publish an equality impact assessment? When can we expect them to do so?

The overall changes to how higher education is financed are basically worse for those who are from low-income backgrounds, because they need the maintenance loans alongside the tuition loans. Increasing their debt burden means that they will spend more and longer paying off their loans. Those from affluent backgrounds, who do not take out the maintenance and tuition loans, will not have that issue. Why, at a time when those from disadvantaged backgrounds are attending top universities in smaller and smaller numbers, are the Government pursuing a policy that will do little more than create a worrying disincentive for those from disadvantaged backgrounds who want to pursue higher education? The changes to the fee repayment threshold will act as a disincentive to many, as will the increase in the student debt burden, especially when taken alongside the change from maintenance grants to loans.

Was the reason the Government did not announce the policy in the spending review that they knew at the time that it would be universally condemned? I agree with the Minister's recent comments that there has been a "worrying lack of progress" on widening participation in higher education. I share his conviction to "redouble our efforts" to boost social mobility. So can he please explain how breaking the trust of students and increasing their debt burden will achieve those laudable goals? It is clear from the debate today that the measure will have the opposite effect. Given the new Prime Minister's words last week—about equality and bridging the gap—will the Minister reconsider that position today?

Mark Pritchard (in the Chair): Before I call the Minister, as colleagues will know, changes made in this Parliament to the Standing Orders allow the mover of a motion to speak for two or three minutes after the Minister has sat down. Helen Jones, would you like to do that?

Helen Jones *indicated assent.*

Mark Pritchard (in the Chair): You would. I call the Minister.

5.49 pm

The Minister for Universities and Science (Joseph Johnson): Thank you for your excellent chairing of this debate, Mr Pritchard. It is a pleasure to serve under your leadership. I am glad to have been reappointed in time to take part in this important debate and discuss the matter with the shadow Secretary of State for Education, the hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner).

I recognise the sincerity and strength of feeling about this question among hon. Members and members of the taskforce that advised the previous Government, but I am sure they understand that my challenge as a Minister in the Department responsible for student and university finance is to ensure that our higher education system remains open to all and that our universities remain well funded. The hon. Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones), who made an excellent opening speech, and other hon. Members have asked several important questions, which I will attempt to answer. However, I will first provide some strategic context to the decisions that the Government took in 2015.

When we reformed student finance in 2011, we put in place a progressive student loans system. Higher education is therefore accessible to all who have the potential to benefit from it, irrespective of their ability to pay. The system is working well and this Government have done more than any other to put higher education financing on a secure and sustainable footing. England has some of the finest universities in the world, and it is vital for our future economic prospects that they remain well funded. Total funding for the sector increased from £22 billion in 2009-10 to £28 billion in 2014-15, and it is forecast to reach £31 billion by 2017-18. We must ensure that our universities have the resources they need and every student has a high-quality experience during their time in higher education.

As the hon. Member for Southport (John Pugh) acknowledged, the warnings in the last Parliament that there would be a deterrent effect on student applications proved wrong. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds

[Joseph Johnson]

are now going to university at a record rate—up from 13.6% in 2009 to around 18.5% in 2015. People from disadvantaged backgrounds are now 36% more likely to go to university than they were under the previous Labour Government.

Helen Jones: Can the Minister enlighten us about the position with the Russell Group universities?

Joseph Johnson: It is important that we make progress across our system. In the guidance that I sent to Les Ebdon, the director of fair access, in February this year—by the way, that was the first guidance that he had had in more than five years—I explicitly gave him strong political support to ensure that all institutions, including those that see themselves as the elite institutions in this country, do the heavy lifting on access and that people who have the capacity to benefit from education at Russell Group institutions get the chance to.

In Scotland, as the hon. Member for Glenrothes (Peter Grant) may be aware, controls on student numbers continue to stifle aspiration and opportunity in a way that is simply no longer the case in England because of the way that we have put our student finance system on a sustainable footing. He made several points in this respect. I steer him towards a recent statement by the Sutton Trust that

“Scottish 18 year olds from the most advantaged areas are still more than four times more likely to go straight to university than those from the least advantaged areas.”

By contrast, the figure in England is 2.4 times. I also point him to a statement by Audit Scotland, which says:

“It has become more difficult in recent years for Scottish students to gain a place at a Scottish university as applications have increased more than the number of offers made by universities.”

Peter Grant: I do not know whether the Minister is aware that the Scottish Government have committed themselves to ensuring that 20% of students in Scotland come from the 20% most deprived backgrounds by 2030. In other words, the Scottish Government have committed to doing away with that imbalance completely by 2030. May we be told what the UK Government's equivalent commitment is?

Joseph Johnson: Certainly. We, too, are committed to increasing the proportion of students from disadvantaged backgrounds who go to university. As I said a moment or two ago, we in fact intend to double that proportion by the end of this Parliament compared with the level that we inherited from the previous Labour Government in 2009-10, taking the proportion from 13.6% to 27.2%. We also want the number of students from BME backgrounds who go to university to increase significantly, by 20%.

Angela Rayner: I stress the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones). The fact is that we still are not making progress with the Russell Group and ancient universities. Can the Minister be more specific about what the Government will do to try to make progress in those vital areas?

Joseph Johnson: Yes. As I said, we have written to Les Ebdon to give him guidance for his dealings with all universities. That guidance gives him strong political

cover to ensure that all institutions do the heavy lifting that he requires of them as he negotiates access agreements. Through the Higher Education and Research Bill, which hon. Members have mentioned, we will strengthen his powers further, so he can start to look beyond the point of access to universities and at the whole student lifecycle. Widening participation is about much more than simply whether disadvantaged people get to university; it is also about how well they attain when they are there and how successfully they move on from higher education into employment or further study.

Jonathan Lord (Woking) (Con): Will the Minister assure us that encouraging all places of further education to widen access will not undermine meritocracy? Will he also take to the newly expanded Department for Education the fact that education, from the early years up to university, is crucial in improving the life chances of those at the bottom of the scale?

Joseph Johnson: Yes, I assure my hon. Friend that universities are autonomous in setting their admissions policies. The access agreements—in future, those will be access and participation agreements—that they come to with Les Ebdon are not targets imposed by the Government but are voluntarily agreed by the universities with the director of fair access. That will remain the case. The autonomy of our great universities is key to underpinning their success and will remain a strong feature of our system.

Jonathan Lord: To return to a point that was raised a moment ago, does the Minister agree that it is somewhat rich for our colleague the Scottish National party spokesman, the hon. Member for Glenrothes, (Peter Grant), to talk about the Scottish system when English taxpayers are subsidising education in Scotland under the Barnett formula? As the Minister and his Department perhaps know, we also could have no tuition fees in this country if we had the same generous per-head allocation from central Government as Scotland does.

Joseph Johnson: Higher education has been a devolved issue since 1999, and it is up to the devolved Administrations to determine how they spend their resources. In England, we have chosen to put our higher education on a sustainable footing, which has meant that proportionately more people can go to universities in this country than ever before. We want that to continue.

[SIR DAVID AMESS *in the Chair*]

Many hon. Members raised the threshold freeze and retrospection. The e-petition that we are discussing was started by Mr Alex True, who is a recent graduate, because he was concerned by the Government's decision, which we announced in November 2015, to freeze the repayment threshold at £21,000 until April 2021. This is an important matter and a proper subject for debate, and I welcome the opportunity to explain why the Government took that decision and its impact.

We considered freezing the threshold because we needed to ensure that higher education funding remained sustainable. The choice was either to ask graduates who benefit from university to meet more of the costs of their studies or to ask taxpayers to contribute more. We undertook a full consultation on the change, as Members have mentioned. The consultation was open

for 12 weeks, until 14 October 2015, and we then undertook a full assessment of the equalities impact, in line with our obligations. The responses to the consultation, which I accept were often against the proposal, were analysed exceptionally carefully. On balance, the Government decided that it was fairer to ask graduates for a greater contribution to the costs of their study rather than to ask taxpayers to do so. The reasons for that are clear. Graduates benefit hugely from higher education. On average, graduate earnings are much higher than those of non-graduates. In 2015, graduates' salaries averaged £31,500, compared with £22,000 for non-graduates. The threshold is still higher in real terms than the one we inherited from the Labour Government.

Paul Blomfield: A good attempt from the Minister, but does he not accept that he is missing the point? It is not a question of comparing the threshold he inherited; it is about the commitment made to students when they entered into their university degrees. Does he not accept the argument that it is a fraudulent practice to enter into an agreement on one set of terms, only for the Government then to change those terms completely? Would he accept that in relation to the purchase of a product he was making?

Joseph Johnson: Hon. Members made much the same point on many occasions throughout the debate, and I will come on to those arguments shortly.

Jonathan Lord: May I sympathise with the points made by the hon. Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield)? It is not just those on the Opposition Benches; those students affected have a lot of sympathy, certainly from me and, I hope, many of my colleagues, on the Government Benches, when it comes to the retrospective nature of these changes. As the Minister knows, I have had a heavy postbag from students for whom the goalposts have been changed and who are effectively due to pay a much higher interest rate than they could realistically have anticipated. I do not think that is right. We have heard eloquent speeches about the other challenges facing the younger members of society today. This is one area where we could help them out.

Joseph Johnson: I look forward to explaining shortly to my hon. Friend exactly why we took the decision and the reasons why we believe it was the right way forward to put our system on a sustainable footing and ensure more opportunities for young people to gain from all the advantages that higher education can bring them.

For loans taken out before 2012, graduates started repaying when their income reached £15,000. That threshold has now risen to £17,495. The Government set the repayment threshold at £21,000 for post-2012 borrowers, proposing that that would be updated annually in line with earnings from 2016, when the first graduates under the new system would start repayments. When the policy was introduced, the threshold of £21,000 was about 75% of expected average earnings in 2016. Updated calculations, based on earnings figures from the Office for National Statistics, show that figure is now 83%, reflecting weaker than expected earnings growth over the intervening period. The proportion of borrowers liable to repay when the £21,000 threshold took effect in April is therefore significantly lower than could have been envisaged when the policy was originally introduced. The threshold would now be set at around £19,000 if it were to reflect the same ratio of average earnings.

I also wish to stress that the impact of the freeze is relatively modest—albeit, I accept, still unwelcome for graduates. Borrowers earning over £21,000 will repay about £6 a week more than if we had increased the threshold in line with average earnings. Of course, those graduates earning less than £21,000 will not be affected at all.

Paul Blomfield: Is the Minister not confirming what I said earlier? I hope he will address that specifically, but the problem is that when the Government introduced the new system, they got the resource accounting and budgeting charge wrong. The consequence is an additional cost on the Exchequer, and instead of taking responsibility for that, the Government have transferred that responsibility on to students.

Joseph Johnson: Modelling the RAB charge is not an easy process, but the figures that the hon. Gentleman referred to earlier were simply not correct. We never modelled the RAB charge at over 50%. We expect about 20% to 25% of the loan book not to be repaid, and that is a deliberate, conscious investment by the Government in the skills base of the country. It is a progressive policy that enables people to go into careers that may not necessarily allow them to repay the full amount, and the Government do that knowingly and willingly.

Angela Rayner: Will the Minister not acknowledge some responsibility of the Government for the lower than expected average earnings projection he has just outlined, in terms of decent jobs and high wages?

Joseph Johnson: I reject the characterisation of our labour market as a failure. Clearly, when we look at the unemployment figures today, we cannot but be struck by the extent to which we have succeeded in getting many thousands more young people into work. The latest unemployment data from the ONS show 23.1 million people working full time, which is 300,000 more than even a year ago, let alone than in 2010. The percentage of young people out of work is now at a record low altogether.

Liz McInnes: While the Minister is quoting employment figures, will he tell us how many of those jobs are high-paid graduate jobs?

Joseph Johnson: Graduates from our universities do spectacularly well on the whole in moving into graduate employment. Obviously, we want variability across the system to even out and we want to ensure less patchiness in the system, but graduates do go into graduate employment on the whole.

The funding system put into place is also progressive. Interest rates after graduation increase with income, so that high earners repay more. For those earning £21,000 or less, the interest rate is set at RPI flat: the loan balance does not increase in real terms. For borrowers who earn more than that, the interest rate increases to a maximum of RPI plus 3%. It is only fair that borrowers who have benefited most from their education should repay the most back into the system.

Student loans are very different from a mortgage or credit card debt. Repayments are determined by income, not the amount borrowed. Borrowers are protected. If at any point their income drops, so do their repayments. Borrowers will repay only if they earn above the threshold

[Joseph Johnson]

and the loans are cancelled after 30 years, so many borrowers, as I said, will not repay the full amount. That is part of the taxpayers' investment in our country's skills base.

I recognise hon. Members' concerns that students may not be fully aware of the terms and conditions of their loans at the time of application. The Student Loans Company does, however, provide students with a clear statement of the terms before the student completes their application for a loan. On page 3 of "Student loans—a guide to terms and conditions", it states clearly—this is not hidden in some small footprint—that

"The regulations may change from time to time and this means the terms of your loan may also change. This guide will be updated to reflect any changes and it's your responsibility to ensure you have the most up-to-date version."

Furthermore, it is worth noting that the threshold freeze did not actually change the terms and conditions; it merely left them unchanged.

That information includes the way that interest will be applied and the repayment terms that will apply. Students are asked explicitly to confirm that they understand the information before they are granted the loan. All the information that the SLC provides to students is reviewed regularly to ensure that it is both accurate and accessible.

Wes Streeting: I have lost count of the number of times that iTunes has changed its terms and conditions, and I check the box and agree every time—more fool me, some might say. However, when the substance of the repayment conditions is written up in large print to entice students in but is open to change through the small print, surely that is not right. Even if the Government and the Student Loans Company took even greater steps to tell potential students that the terms and conditions could change, that is hardly a reassuring message to send to them, is it?

Joseph Johnson: There are always ways in which the Government can try to make things more explicit, but we cannot deny that on page 3 of the guide to terms and conditions students were clearly informed of the possibility that terms might change. In the event, they did not change—they were left unchanged, as I said.

Let me turn to the benefits of the freeze to the system and all the other reasons we felt it important to do what we did. A sustainable student finance system enabled us to abolish student number controls, lifting the cap on aspiration and enabling more people to receive the benefits of a university education. That is essential if we are to maintain our place as a country with a modern, highly skilled economy. Freezing the threshold means that we expect to recover £3.2 billion more of the loan outlay from existing borrowers. From future borrowers, we expect an additional £1 billion of repayments per £15 billion of loan outlay.

We send proportionately fewer people to university to study at undergraduate level than our main competitors. Between now and 2022, more than half of job vacancies

will be in occupations most likely to employ graduates. If we are to continue to grow our economy, we must equip our young people with the skills and qualifications they need to fill those roles. England is not unique in grappling with those problems, but we are one of the few countries to have found a sustainable solution. That has been recognised internationally; the OECD has praised the student loan system in England as that of "one of the few countries to have figured out a sustainable approach to higher education finance".

I recognise the strength of feeling there is on the issue, but the Government must balance the interests of students, who benefit from higher education, with those of general taxpayers. We have taken difficult decisions, but in the process we have underpinned the financial sustainability of our student funding system in a manner that means we can lift student number controls and enable proportionately more young people than ever before to benefit from university.

6.11 pm

Helen Jones: I had hoped for a more encouraging reply from the Minister, because he is generally a decent soul, but his reply showed that he just does not get it. We have heard about the impact on poorer students, on women and on those from ethnic minorities. Most of all, we have heard about the impact on trust in politics and the Government. The Minister has told us that the Government have not changed the terms and conditions, and that is absolutely true; but the Government have gone back on what they told students. He says we want a system that is open for all, but at the moment our most prestigious universities are open to all in the same way that the Ritz hotel is. He has not tackled that. He will not give us the figures for poorer students going to the most prestigious universities. He has admitted that the Government got themselves into trouble on this issue, because average earnings did not rise as much as they hoped they would. In other words, their economic policy is at fault.

As for the system being sustainable, all the evidence shows that it is in real trouble. It is not going to be sustainable in the long term or deliver what students want, or what the country wants, which is an opportunity for every young person, wherever they come from, to go to the university that is right for them—not the cheapest or the nearest—and for universities to admit them. Despite the talk of meritocracy, we do not have a meritocracy—unless we believe that those who are better off are automatically cleverer than other people; because in our system at the moment, people are less likely to go to a prestigious university if they are poor. I hoped that the Minister would be able to respond to those concerns today. Sadly, he has not. Students and their parents will note that.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered e-petition 131167 relating to changes to the student loans agreement.

6.13 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statement

Monday 18 July 2016

PRIME MINISTER

Machinery of Government Changes

The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May): This written statement sets out several machinery of Government changes that have been made.

A new Department for exiting the European Union has been created, with responsibility for overseeing preparations for the withdrawal of the UK from the EU and conducting these withdrawal negotiations in support of the Prime Minister. It will also lead work to establish the future relationship between the UK and EU. In doing this it will work very closely with the UK's devolved administrations, the UK Parliament, other Government Departments and a wide range of other interested parties. The new Department will be formed by combining staff from the Cabinet Office's Europe Unit, the Europe Directorate of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and the UK's permanent representation to the EU; and in time will take on staff from other Government Departments as is needed.

A new Department for International Trade has also been created, with overall responsibility for promoting British trade across the world. It will develop, co-ordinate and deliver a new trade policy for the UK, including preparing for and then negotiating free trade agreements and market access deals with non-EU countries. The

new Department will be a specialised body with significant new trade negotiating capacity. It will take on the responsibilities of UK trade and investment, the relevant trade functions of the former Department for Business Innovation and Skills; and take on responsibility for UK export finance.

The functions of the former Department for Business, Innovation and Skills in respect of higher and further education policy, apprenticeships and skills have been transferred to the Department for Education. Bringing these responsibilities together in a single Department will mean that the Government can take a comprehensive, end-to-end view of skills and education, supporting people from early years through to postgraduate study and work.

The Department for Energy and Climate Change and the remaining functions of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills have been merged to form a new Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, bringing together responsibility for business, industrial strategy, and science and innovation with energy and climate change policy. The new Department will be responsible for helping to ensure that the economy grows strongly in all parts of the country, based on a robust industrial strategy. It will ensure that the UK has energy supplies that are reliable, affordable and clean; and it will make the most of the economic opportunities of new technologies, and support the UK's global competitiveness more effectively.

More detailed Cabinet Office papers on each of these changes have been placed in the Library of both Houses.

Attachments can be viewed online at: <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications>.

[HCWS94]

ORAL ANSWERS

Monday 18 July 2016

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT ..	525	COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT—	
Business Rates.....	525	<i>continued</i>	
Business Rates.....	537	High Street Retailers.....	531
Coastal Regeneration.....	527	Homelessness.....	528
Combined Authorities.....	537	House Building.....	535
Council Services.....	529	Rough Sleeping/Homelessness.....	533
Deprived Communities: Infrastructure		Social Housing.....	530
Investment.....	538	Topical Questions.....	541
Green-belt Land.....	541		

WRITTEN STATEMENT

Monday 18 July 2016

	<i>Col. No.</i>
PRIME MINISTER.....	19WS
Machinery of Government Changes.....	19WS

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CONTENTS

Monday 18 July 2016

Oral Answers to Questions [Col. 525] [see index inside back page]
Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

Terrorist Attack: Nice [Col. 545]
Statement—(Amber Rudd)

UK's Nuclear Deterrent [Col. 559]
Motion—(The Prime Minister)—agreed to

Westminster Hall
Student Loans Agreement [Col. 239WH]
General Debate

Written Statement [Col. 19WS]

Written Answers to Questions [The written answers can now be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>]
